



Eight Bells at Salamander

THE UNWRITTEN STORY OF SHIPS AND MEN IN SOUTH AFRICAN WATERS, AND SOME
OF THE FORGOTTEN ADVENTURES AND MYSTERIES OF THE WIDE OCEANS THAT
WASH THE SHORES OF AFRICA AND BREAK ON THE LONELY ISLES.

By

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“Tavern of the Seas”,

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“These Wonders to Behold”

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“I think you should go through the dunes and the grain fields to Salamander Bay one day in the spring, when the wildflowers are blazing in the sailors’ cemetery. There are ghosts of ships and seamen in that old harbour, but the ghosts of Salamander harm no one when they strike eight bells at midnight.”

Chapter Two. *“Eight Bells at Salamander”*.

Howard Timmins

Cape Town

CONTENTS

1. Window On The World
2. Eight Bells At Salamander
3. Who Discovered The Cape?
4. Lost Without Trace
5. Fire And Ice
6. Found Abandoned
7. Stolen Ships
8. The Prison Hulks
9. Three Men Survived
10. South Africa's Own Ships
11. Sea Gypsies
12. Ocean Jabberwocks
13. Russian Armada Off The Cape
14. The Foolish Hero
15. Sea Mysteries In Wartime
16. Man Overboard
17. The Sherard Osborn Affair
18. Mysteries Of The Whales
19. African Mermaids
20. Harbour Lights
21. The Lilac Liners
22. Tristan Holds A Secret
23. Isle Of Dead Ships
24. Atlantic Treasure Isles
25. The Gough Island Diamonds
26. Atlantis And Other Lost Islands
27. South Atlantic Cruise
28. River Plate
29. The Ocean Trek
30. Mystery In The Mascarenes
31. Isles Of The Great Hush

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Greek S.S. *George M. Livanos* on the
rocks

Winton on Milnerton beach

The waters of Africa hold the darkest
of all sea mysteries

The junk *Keying* which sailed round
the Cape to London

The tug *Sir Frederick* at Port Elizabeth

The *Success* was a frequent Table Bay
visitor

Handsome windows decorated the
square-cut stern

The ill-fated *Drummond Castle*

“But as he spoke, everyone was swept
away”

Shipbuilding is not such a recent
industry in South Africa

Nearly all the leading builders had
their yards on the edge of Table
Bay

The Scot was known as the “White
Albatross of the South”

Four generations of Benns piloted
ships into Knysna

Paddle-wheel steamer *John Paterson*
in Table Bay

The battered *Cutty Sark* being towed
into Table Bay

They called the *Great Eastern* the
“floating island”

Pendennis Castle leaves Table Bay

The Tristan islanders built themselves
a cottage

Fishing was wonderful

I gazed in wonder on the new Rio

The line of Copacabana skyscrapers

The *Boca* is the old harbour of Buenos
Aires

Worn-out men-o’-war, sailing ships,
river steamers

Chapter One

WINDOW ON THE WORLD

Now the stars are going out and the salt tang of Table Bay comes flooding through my window with the dawn. Fishing craft take shape beyond the kelp. I see men in dinghies hauling their crawfish nets, and I can smell the seaweed. Steamers move in along the golden track of sunrise, making for the long grey finger of the breakwater. This is the hour when I give thanks once again for my balcony over the South Atlantic. This is a tremendous poem in colour, a view of the endless drama of the sea, a window on the world.

Away in the east a warmer sun will be touching a thousand dhows crossing the Indian Ocean, while the Arab crews roast and grind their coffee beans. The peaks of Mauritius will be

afame; the white palace at Zanzibar, all the brilliant tropical harbours southwards to Durban will dazzle the beholders. Up and down the coasts of Africa the new day will be working its spell.

Now the whole South Atlantic must be sharing the splendour. Masts and hulls of many fine ships along the sea lanes gleam in the sunlight. Mid-ocean islands feel the dawn wind and the sun; all those lonely isles where I once watched the sunrise; high, mournful Tristan, crumbling St. Helena, Ascension with its screaming wide-awake birds; and all the distant rocks where only adventurers and treasure-seekers come and go. The whole South Atlantic lives again from teeming Rio to remote Gough Island, from Congo to Walvis Bay. Every bay, every beach, the blue immensity of ocean, all the

waters of Africa are alive under the sun. My balcony seems to command a vast panorama of adventure. I can observe the ships of the world, new ships and old, and doomed ships going over the horizon for the last time.

Yes, the waters of Africa hold the darkest of all sea mysteries, and these waters are the richest of all the oceans in sea legend. Man's first dug-outs and skin-covered boats were launched from African beaches. Jason, hero of the world's first sea tale, steered his argonauts to the Nile in search of the Golden Fleece; and bold Ulysses sailed along African shores to the Canary Islands. Norse sagas speak of Viking raids on the coasts of North Africa. Moorish seamen, with their lateen sails, were probably the first to discover the trick of voyaging against the wind. When the Portuguese

navigators came on the scene it was the African coastline they burned to explore.

Go back as far as you like in the written story of mankind and you will see the waters of Africa. Go where you will in Africa, and you will still encounter relics and reminders of the ocean you have left. Figureheads and anchors confront you in unexpected places. The furniture of a homestead far beyond the smell of salt water may include an oak tub used on board a Dutch East Indiaman for holding salt meat. There may be a copper ship's lantern or cabin mirror or brass saluting cannon. Groote Schuur has a ship model, an early nineteenth-century East Indiaman that Rudyard Kipling gave to Rhodes. Greedy seagulls have abandoned salt water for new sanctuaries on Rand mine dumps.



I can observe the ships of the world, new ships and old, and doomed ships going over the horizon for the last time. This is the Winton on Milnerton Beach in 1936.

Ships' bells have a way of travelling into the far interior. When the lovely clipper-bowed Aberdeen line steamer *Thermopylae* was lost in Table Bay at the end of last century, one of her handsome brass bells found its way to Mafeking railway station, there to sound its warnings for years in the dry Kalahari air.

Swellendam has a figurehead which no one has been able to name. It stands in the Drostdy grounds, a warrior nine feet tall with right hand missing. Some said that it came from the *Queen of the Thames*, wrecked in Struys Bay ninety years ago; but Lloyds of London, the underwriters, denied it emphatically. The figurehead, which may represent a Viking or a Crusader, remains a complete mystery.

Perhaps the most dramatic of all such fragments are the rare paintings of

ships left by Bushman artists in their caves. No doubt they were filled with wonder when they first saw Portuguese or Dutch vessels under sail. They carried the memories of these strange invaders back to the mountains with them, and so you may find masts and spars, flags and sails, among the lions and antelopes. Paintings which may represent ships of the Van Riebeeck period have been located in Cedarberg range. Such discoveries are usually kept secret nowadays for fear of vandals. Sea creatures adorn Bushman caves in the Orange Free State, two hundred miles from the nearest coast. Abbé Breuil found paintings of whales and sharks near Ladybrand; and in the same mountains another primitive artist left for posterity a vivid memory of fish attacked by dolphins.

It was an Afrikaans newspaper published in Cape Town which meditated not long ago on the attitude of the Afrikaner towards the sea. "For him the sea is, and remains, a strange element," the *Burger* declared. "Treasures at the bottom of the sea have not the slightest attraction for him. The same man who will not flinch from planning gold mines with a depth of more than ten thousand feet sees no chance of descending twenty or thirty feet in the sea."

This is substantially true. South Africans are coast-lovers rather than seafarers; and while the land adventurer can be found almost anywhere in the Union, the Admiral Biermann or "Sailor" Malan is a rarity. I have heard of a coaster manned by Zulus, but there again you will find many more of that race working underground. The

call of the sea has always been strong in South Africa, but the traditional answer was the ox-wagon loaded with coffee and rusks, biltong and dried fruit, for a holiday at the coast.

Yet, as I have shown, it is impossible to escape the tang of the sea; and I for one can never have too much of it. A window on the sea is indeed a window on the world. Now and again an isolated Afrikaner, running his sheep near the coast, has suddenly found himself the saviour of a strange, tattered, exhausted band of men, women and children who have just, and only just survived the perils of the sea. An old report which came my way told of such an episode on the coast of Namaqualand more than a century ago; a forgotten tale, yet one with more pathos and suspense than the famous "Skeleton Coast" affair

during World War II, when the *Dunedin Star* was beached far from civilization.

I cherish my own unrecorded memories of African waters. Once, as a young reporter, I visited a ship with a well-hidden secret which I had no chance of discovering at the time. She was the small German naval survey ship *Meteor*, and in 1926 she lay in Table Bay Docks for several weeks while Captain Spiess, in command, recovered from an operation. She had been cruising up and down the South Atlantic measuring currents, taking deep-sea soundings and looking for uncharted rocks. Her staff of civilian scientists worked in a spacious laboratory on board the little ship. But the only thought that entered my mind was that a hard-pressed nation such as Germany, which had only recently

emerged from the chaos of inflation, was showing a remarkable scientific spirit.

Captain Spiess, who knew how to handle reporters, informed me that he had called at South Trinidad, the uninhabited treasure island off the coast of Brazil. He smiled disarmingly as he added that he had not organised a search for the gold and jewels from the cathedrals of South America supposed to have been hidden there by Spanish royalists after Bolivar had driven them from the mainland. Spiess wound up the interview with the words: "I am pleased with the results of the voyage, but the scientists will not be able to publish their report for about twenty-five years."

When that report was published after World War II the mission of the *Meteor* was revealed for the first time.

It was clear that Spiess had covered up the true purpose cleverly. Fritz Haber, a German chemist with a great reputation, had put a scheme before his government for extracting gold profitably from sea water. The authorities had seen a possible means of paying Germany's war reparations, and had allowed Haber to direct the cruise of the *Meteor* as she sought payable gold in the South Atlantic. The ship had gone almost to the Antarctic Circle testing Haber's theory. Captain Spiess certainly knew how to keep a secret, but he might just as well have searched South Trinidad for treasure. There is gold in the ocean, but no one has ever been able to design a plant to put the extraction on a paying basis.¹

Some time after the secret of the *Meteor* had been revealed there came from the ocean a mysterious breath of adventure which puzzled me for years. It was a note, left on my desk in the newspaper office by a seafaring man – “a big fella, said he was a bo'sun,” someone told me. The note read: “Have got Chink wedding rings. Could not manage Jivaro heads this time, police troublesome. Jimmy dead. Pnom Penh. Will leave goods with Jo.” The signature was indecipherable. Even the printers, whose skill is uncanny, were baffled.

I kept the message, though the words irritated me whenever I studied them. It was meant for me, though I had asked no one to procure Chink wedd-

£30,000,000 worth of gold in one cubic mile of sea water.

¹ Chemists estimate that there is about

ing rings. As for those evil mummified heads, shrunk to a third of their size by the Jivaro tribesmen of Ecuador, I would not have one under my roof. I could not place Jimmy, though I discovered from the atlas that Pnom Penh was in French Indo-China. Jo was another mystery, so that I could not claim the goods.

Here was drama and mystery indeed, and I never lost interest as the years passed. I was sure the riddle would never be answered, but I kept the paper and I have it now. Twenty years went by, and the note remained at the back of my mind. Then a big fellow came to my door, a seafaring man. He was so big and tough that he could swallow a tumbler of neat gin without coughing. He said I must call him Butch.

When I helped him out of his overcoat, and admired it, he remarked: "Made in Italy from two camel-hair blankets. Military issue you know mister – soldiers kinda lost them after the war." His accent was a mixture of American and Norwegian, but he was really a South African of Scandinavian descent who had been away from home a long time. I remembered him vaguely, and put the gin bottle in front of him, and listened.

This enormous man on my sofa had run away from school in Cape Town to join the Finnish sailing ship Parma. "It's not all struggle under sail, you know, mister," Butch went on. "Sometimes you have weeks with nothing much to do. I never worry – I wasn't born to worry. In the end I took a Norwegian mate's ticket. I'll never be a master. The mates can come aboard

drunk – they’re expected to drink. A drunken captain gets the sack. I’m not reliable or conscientious on shore – only at sea. It’s a good life at sea. Go away once and you’ll never come back. Sometimes you wonder what it’s all for, and then you find it’s so good you can’t leave it.”

The gin was sinking fast, but the only effect was the stirring of the man’s memories. He had clubbed seals on the beaches of Kerguelen, run guns to revolutionaries in South America, and smuggled liquor across Puget Sound. Salmon fishing in British Columbia had been among his more respectable occupations. He had visited the dives of the world’s waterfronts and pressed his philosophic face against the bars of the world’s jails.

I asked Butch what happened when he found himself penniless and stranded

in a distant seaport. Did he go to the seamen’s mission?

“I’ll sweat for my food and I’ll bum my food, but I’ll be damned if I’ll pray for it,” Butch was saying, when a bell rang at last in my mind. I went to my steel filing cabinet and found the note.

“Yes, that’s my signature – Butch Larsen,” he declared. “Those Jivaro heads you wanted, mister – they’re getting hard to smuggle out now, you know, and it’s two years in the can if they catch you.”

I assured him that he was not to take this risk on my behalf. It seemed that we had been talking about curios on my previous visit, and had formed the impression that I was interested.

“Jimmy was my brother,” he explained. “I thought you knew Jimmy. He was at sea, too, and he died of fever at

Pnom Penh – that's in Indo-China. Jo?
She's my sister."

So the parts fell into place after twenty years. As he was leaving, his eye fell on a headline in that day's newspaper dealing with a South American revolution. "Wish I was there," he muttered eagerly. "A chap like me can pick up a fast buck in a revolution. Gun-running mister, there's money in gun-running." He went on his way, leaving me slightly envious and with a feeling that it will be a long time before the answer to another old mystery comes to my door. But I had also been reminded of the difference in outlook between the landsman and the happy bird of passage. My friend Butch seemed to have returned after twenty years not only to solve a mystery but to give me a glimpse of wide and strange horizons. "Have got Chink

wedding rings. Could not manage Jivaro heads this time."

Of course the sea mysteries that stand grimly above all others are the missing ships. Many would place the *Waratah* at the head of the list; but I shall finish with the *Waratah* here and now because I am sure that the greatest modern riddle of South African seas has been fully explained. I knew the man who saw the *Waratah* sink.

He was the famous Joe Conquer of the South African Air Force, a sergeant-major when I first met him, later a commissioned officer. Conquer was a signaller in the Gape Mounted Riflemen on July 28, 1909, stationed at the Xora River mouth in the Transkei for live shell practice. That day Conquer watched through his telescope while a ship exactly like the *Waratah* crawled down the coast in a

gale. Another signaller named Adshead was with him.

“I saw her roll very heavily,” Conquer told me. “She seemed to be overtaken by a following sea, and then when I looked for her again she had gone. I am convinced that I saw the end of the *Waratah*. Three days later newspapers reached our camp reporting that the *Waratah* was overdue.”

Conquer marked on a map the spot where he had seen the ship disappear. A bearing of 240 degrees from the knoll at the Xora River mouth gives the direction, and he estimated that the ship was four miles offshore. He reported what he had seen to C.M.R. headquarters, first by semaphore and later in writing. Wreckage was found in the neighbourhood soon afterwards. Deck-chairs, cushions and an oar drift-

ed ashore, but there was nothing bearing the name of the *Waratah*.

Years afterwards a military pilot pinpointed a sunken wreck he had observed while flying along the coast. He compared his map with the map Conquer had kept. The positions almost coincided.

So the *Waratah* no longer dominates the missing ships as far as I am concerned. The waters of Africa have known other disappearances just as dramatic; not only sailing ships, large steamers and coasters, but British men-o'-war. Most of those ships were lost without trace. There was no alert and keen-eyed Conquer to see them go and to record the disaster.

Another most gripping class of sea mystery is found in the derelict. I shall not ask you to listen to one more

recital of the *Mary Celeste* affair. Writer after writer twisted the basic facts of this narrative, and most of them could not even spell the name correctly. Ninety years have passed since the brigantine *Mary Celeste* was found abandoned, and the reading public still seems to prefer fictitious theories to the truth. If you go to the sworn statement made by the first man to board the *Mary Celeste* you will find no mention of the famous half-finished meal and other dramatic items such as the boats in the davits. *In fact, the only boat the brigantine carried had gone.* Three feet of water were found in the hold. Captain Alan Villiers, one of the finest master mariners of our day, was convinced after careful investigation that the *Mary Celeste* was abandoned because her captain feared an explosion in the

cargo of alcohol. Ten souls, all on board the *Mary Celeste*, scrambled into the lifeboat, but they never made the shore.

I have discovered more than one *Mary Celeste* type of mystery, however, in South African waters. These stories do not appear in the classics of the sea, and some are as fresh as the sea winds that blow over the bone of those old dead ships. Here and there I found the truth behind the mystery. Others are matters of guesswork in which I shall do my best.

Yes, I love all sea mysteries, even when they baffle me completely or take as long to solve as the big fellow's note. Who were the first to sail along the South African coast? It is possible that there were sea explorers in Cape waters long before the Portuguese, and for years I have

studied the claims made on behalf of the Phoenicians and others. Coins and porcelain found in East Africa and Rhodesia prove that the Chinese sailed across the Indian Ocean in their junks as early as the seventh century. Chinese pottery of the twelfth to the fifteenth century has been discovered in the Northern Transvaal, and one fragment suggests that the Chinese rounded the Cape and ventured as far along the west coast as the Congo River.

Praise the Portuguese for bringing Europe and Africa together and opening up trade. Let us have statues of Bartholomew Diaz and Vasco da Gama. Let us not overlook the clever Jewish navigator who sailed with Da Gama when he doubled the Cape for the first time. (It seems that Da Gama took another Jewish shipmate on shore

with him at the Gape to act as interpreter in the hope of gathering information about the sea route to India from the Hottentots!) But do not swear that the keels of the adventurous Portuguese were the first to furrow the seas of Southern Africa. There may have been earlier voyagers.

How much do we really know about the voyages of long ago? Truth and legend become so mixed that even our own lives (when you come to think of it) are often very different from the “facts” of our imaginations. Stone monuments such as the Portuguese navigators left to mark their discoveries are real, and no further proofs are needed. Would that the Vikings had left something in America to bear out the Icelandic sagas! For all we know, people from America may have discovered Europe long before

Viking or Columbus sailed westwards across the Atlantic. I have read a theory that Eskimos in kayaks were cast up on the shores of Germany two thousand years ago. Recent cockleshell voyages have proved that such a theory is not fantastic. That is why I am not inclined to sneer at the tales of ancient voyages in South African seas.

When the present century opened there were many gaps in the charts of African waters. Lonely islands were found to have been charted in the wrong positions, and others, reported by one shipmaster after another, could not be found at all. Even today the British Admiralty sailing directions, compiled for navigators, are full of serious warnings and are accompanied by long lists of corrections. The coasts and oceans of Africa still hold their

secrets – and their threats for careless seamen.

Fine reading, those sailing directions. Sketches of lighthouses and capes, river mouths and harbour entrances, make the armchair navigator feel that he is on the bridge of a ship coming in to her landfall with a hot sun on the awnings and the bo'sun in the chains ready to heave the lead. You see what a long way it is between ports in the South Atlantic compared with the old, freezing northern seas. Here are long, unbroken coastlines. Only a few remote peaks and hummocks appear in mid-ocean instead of the generous showers of islands in other waters. But the solitary South Atlantic peaks have known their Crusoe's and their treasure-hunters; desperate men and women bent only on survival; men



**The Coasts and oceans of Africa still hold their secrets – and threats for careless seamen.
Here is the Greek s.s. George M. Livanos on the rocks at Green point in 1947.**

determined to win riches in many forms. Pirate's gold, diamonds, guano.

Greatest and oldest of all Atlantic island mysteries is the Atlantis riddle. Some call it a myth, but from time to time fresh evidence revives the story and strengthens the possibility that a sunken continent still awaits discovery. The literature is enormous, for mankind finds Atlantis one of the most fascinating themes ever written. Whenever I land on those islands which are said to be the mountain-tops of Atlantis I find myself wondering whether it can be true. I will share my ideas with you – for what they are worth. Phantom islands, too, have played queer tricks with South Atlantic navigators. Islands, like ships, are sometimes reported as missing. Years later they may be rediscovered.

More often they are wiped off the charts for ever.

Africa's oceans reveal strong contrasts in dangers to navigation. Land ice from the Antarctic, with cliffs a thousand feet thick, break away and drift northwards to Tristan or the Cape of Good Hope. Turning away from this menace, the shipmaster may encounter one of those Indian Ocean cyclones that sweep across land and sea, wrecking towns and plantations, hurling large deep water ships into forests – or into the ocean depths.

Yet the waters of Africa are gentle, as a rule, when you think of the storms that ravage the North Atlantic even in summer. Once the sailing ships were becalmed in the doldrums between West Africa and South America for so long that some crews died of thirst. Master mariners prayed for the north-

east or the southeast trade winds, the south-west monsoon that blows on the West African coast in the rainy season, the dusty harmattan from the Sahara, even the tornadoes roaring out of an arch of dark clouds. Anything but the doldrums.

Those old windjammer skippers had to avoid the coastal current that set them into the great curves of the Saharan coast and left them becalmed and embayed while the north-west swell lifted them relentlessly towards the shore. Then there are the powerful Equatorial and Guinea currents running side by side for a thousand miles, but in opposite directions. Caught in the Guinea current, a derelict may drift fifty miles a day.

Sailing ships bound from England to the Cape covered about fifteen hundred miles more than steamers on

the direct run. Under sail alone, you have to make westing from the English Channel, cross the equator near the South American coast in the hope of avoiding the doldrums; then, having with luck achieved this work of art, you stand across the south-east trade and steer eastwards for the Cape. I shall talk of certain ships that made the famous passage; not the galleons and East Indiamen, the Blackwall frigates, whalers, tea clippers and wool clippers; but queer little craft with their own stories. This was the run on which the *Mignonette* foundered, the tiny yawl with three men and a boy on board. You may remember that the three men were picked up in their dinghy sixteen hundred miles from Cape Town. They had eaten the cabin boy.



Yes, the waters of Africa hold the darkest of all sea mysteries, and these waters are the richest of all the oceans in sea legend.

Every page of the sailing directions carries some reminder of sea romance and sea hazard. Some of the names cause a wistful feeling. I am an incorrigible traveller, but I cannot expect to see all those places now – Fayal and Horta, Terceira and San Miguel, Porto Caetano and Villa Franca. Thank heaven that I have glimpsed the Desertas and the Salvage Islands, and heard from a twentieth-century adventurer tales of those rocks that have never been told before.

I turn the pages, read the names and recall my African voyages under the flags of nearly all the great seafaring nations. Names still make me restless. What old adventurers placed Tamara Island and Topsail Point on the chart? Pirate Bay is in the book, too, with Cape Lagosta (because of the lobsters), Rio Zaire and Cabega de

Cobra. Rio Zaire is the Congo, of course, and you can drop a bucket overboard forty miles out at sea from the mouth and haul up fresh water.

Here are the mangrove swamps and mountains I once knew, here are the seaman's landmarks. Hills with castles or mosques or tombs with white cupolas. Sugar-loaf hills and the other projections which British seamen joyously named "the paps" .(On the French charts you find "Les Mamelles" and "Petites Mamelles" all over the place.)² Beacons and buoys and lights, shallow banks, coral anchor-

² Paps of Banda appear on the charts near the Congo River mouth; and farther north, near Sangatanga Bay (marvelous name) are The Paps, described in the sailing directions as "two round hills". Sail round the world, in remote parts, and you will always be approaching The Paps.

ages, and bays where rollers are to be expected at full and change of the moon. You can start an argument easily enough among seamen by asking them what causes the rollers.

Now my eye lights on Wreck Island and other mentions of wrecks. Some wrecks vanish in a night, others remain for generations. Here is Cape Nun, the sea water reddened by the fine Sahara sand. There are harbours where all drinking water must be distilled from the sea. I observe the lighters and surf boats coming out, bearing such local produce as bananas and yams, oranges and figs, canary seeds and almonds. Such are the waters of Africa, with their background of wild adventure, bloodshed and sudden death. And all this comes to me in the sunrise as I

smell the ocean and sail again over the glowing seas of memory.

Chapter Two

EIGHT BELLS AT SALAMANDER

ON a clear day I can see a long stretch of coastline from my balcony. I know every landmark on that stretch, for it is one of the coasts I sailed long ago in small yachts. Such voyages remain in the memory.

That run northwards out of Table Bay leads to Saldanha. On the Saldanha chart you will find the little-known inlet called Salamander Bay, a safe anchorage facing Langebaan village. I have had much to say about Saldanha in previous works, but I have neglected Salamander, with its memories of bygone ships and seamen. My own memories of this forgotten backwater go back more than forty years. Salamander appeals to me because it has clung to some of the relics of an adventurous past. It

was at Salamander long ago that I began to understand the spell of African waters.

No fabulous lizard ever lived in fire at Salamander Bay. This place took its name from the Dutch ship *Salamander* of Delft. She put in there more than three centuries ago, a sea-weary ship with many of her sailors lying helpless in their hammocks. The *Salamander* had drifted off course until the men were dizzy and the teeth loose in their gums. You can imagine how this scurvy stricken company must have welcomed the smell of the land in November at Salamander Bay.

Van Riebeeck had a party of seal hunters there. They showed the men of the *Salamander* where to fill their barrels with fresh water, for the ship had only ten leaguers left. Then they collected thousands of seabirds' eggs

on the islands, and knocked down sea-birds, and pulled up some vegetables grown at the place now known as Oude Post; and new life flowed through the *Salamander*. When the northerly breeze came through she was able to sail on to Table Bay.

I cannot say that the *Salamander* left anything of herself at Salamander Bay, though there may be skeletons or coins or inscriptions on stones under the dunes for all I know. There is a tiny graveyard near the old slipway of the abandoned whaling station, and the headstones take you back for a century. H.M.S. *Boadicea* anchored here and buried a lad of nineteen who had fallen from aloft. An old tragedy indeed, but a sympathetic woman read the faint words and remarked to me: "Poor boy – I suppose it was months before his mother heard the news."

Another grave had one of those artificial wreaths which had resisted the winter gales and the south-Easters of the years miraculously.

Among the dead were smallpox victims. Ship after ship was sent to Saldanha in quarantine during the 'seventies and 'eighties of last century. The *Norseman* was here, followed by the *Northam* and the *Celt*. A smallpox epidemic in Cape Town in 1882 became so serious that many shipping companies were afraid to call. Salamander Bay was a lazaret for years, and not until 1893 was the camp broken up. Camp Point recalls the years of the smallpox.

A buoy off Salamander Bay marks the sunken wreck of the *Wilhelmina Cornelia*. I have fished from a dinghy there most profitably, for many fish love to haunt the weed-hung hulls of

lost ships. But no one has been able to tell me why the unknown *Wilhelmina Cornelia* ended her career there. She may have been a treasure ship for all I know. I should have asked old Jim Church, the Langebaan carpenter, who knew every wreck in the bay. Jim Church, who swam three times a day when he was over seventy and looked like a man of fifty. And now it is too late, too late.

Sailor men ninety years ago spoke with respect of an iron clipper named *Emily Faithfull*. She was a full-rigged ship with single topgallants and royals when she first sailed out of Liverpool; but later the name was changed to *Iron Queen* and she was converted to barque rig. As the *Iron Queen* she hauled out for Australia with passengers and knew the doldrums and the “roaring forties”. Then she was sold to

Norway and became the *H. C. Richards*. Early this century the iron barque was dismantled off the Cape, and when they towed her in she was condemned. So the old clipper came to Salamander Bay, and found her last resting place when they scuttled her to form a jetty.

As I sit on her rusty fo’c’stle with a fishing rod in my hand I can look down into the dark and narrow space where the kelp now moves with the tide, but where tarry-fisted seamen once had their bunks and sang their songs. I see her, not as a hulk, but with a cloud of canvas set, speed and grace in every line of her. Once the brass on her skylights shone, her decks gleamed white with holystone, and she was a queen of the seas indeed.

Moored to the clipper there is an old-fashioned steam whaler that has not

yet been finally cast aside. She, too, is rusty; her doors slam in the wind; everything is in process of decay. Yet I discover a motor-pump in the stern; and while I am exploring her from harpoon gun to stern, two men come on board and start the motor, so that she remains afloat. But I think it will need a tremendous boom in whaling before the Norwegians return to the little mess-room with its torn leather seats.

I first knew Salamander Bay in 1916, when Hans Ellefsen was manager and I was an adventurous boy working as deckhand in the *Ingerid*, a famous old coaster. That was the time when the *Clara* tied up alongside the hulk and I first saw Captain Axel Johanson and his walrus moustache. He and the *Clara* were both in their prime. It was a memorable partnership, the most

remarkable partnership between a man and a small coasting steamer ever known in South African waters.

Oscar Thesen, who ran the Thesen Line and employed Axel Johanson for many, many years, once showed me a logbook which revealed that the *Clara* was the first of the partners to reach the South African coast. She was built as a dredger, eighty feet in length; and carried sails to help her engines along on the voyage from the Clyde to Port Elizabeth. That was in 1897, she made six and a half knots most of the time and kept close inshore in case she ran out of coal.

Johanson was a Swede. He first sailed away from Gothenburg as thirteen-year-old cook in a schooner. He joined the *Clara* as cook very early this century. The *Clara* had been turned into a coaster. By 1906, Johanson had

worked his way out of the galley and up to the bridge as mate. Within ten years he was master of the little ship. No certificates were required in the South African coasting trade at that time. Owners picked their men on the basis of practical ability. Throughout his seafaring career of sixty-four years, Captain Johanson never sat for an examination or held a master's certificate of any kind. He was beyond the law, a seaman celebrated for his skill. I never heard of any other man on any ocean who rose from cook to captain.

Johanson gained a reputation as a clever salvage skipper. He lifted a cargo of pianos from a German ship wrecked at Cape Recife, and he helped to refloat the Blue Funnel liner *Ping Suey* after she had been aground for eight months on Dassen Island. The

Clara, with her shallow draught, could run into difficult places where other ships dared not go. His most dangerous job was the rescue of seamen from the Swedish freighter *Bia* when she struck Albatross Rock near Cape Point.

"Huge seas washing over us," reported the distress call. "Am breaking up. Crew in great danger. Send tug with lifeboat at once." Soon the Admiralty tug *Afrikaner* was standing by, and the Cape Town harbour tug *Ludwig Wiener* arrived. But they could not approach the wreck. The seas were breaking over her so heavily that the ominous thudding sound of salt water against steel could be heard a mile away.

At great risk the *Afrikaner* sent a boat among the reefs and rescued fifteen men. Still heavier seas ended this

effort, and twenty-five men remained on board the *Bia*. At this stage Captain Johanson happened to be passing in the *Clara*, and decided to take a hand. It seemed hopeless, but the three rescue ships waited, hoping for a lull.

Suddenly they observed the desperate men in the *Bia* lowering one of their own lifeboats. The boat rose and fell on the tremendous seas, vanishing and reappearing. The watching seamen felt that no boat could stand such a battering, and they were right. The lifeboat was swamped, but most of the crew were saved. Four men were drowned. And there were still fourteen men on board the wreck.

That was Captain Johanson's greatest day. He offered to take the rocket apparatus on board the *Clara* and run in close in the hope of saving his fellow-countrymen. The plan was

carried out. Somehow the shallow Clara evaded all the rocks and reefs until she came to a patch of broken water two hundred yards from the surf-beaten wreck. Johanson fired rocket after rocket before a line fell at last across the deck of the *Bia*, there to be secured by the frantic men. They hauled the breeches-buoy on board. One by one they were dragged to safety on board the *Clara*. Fourteen men – and it was four hours before the last man left the wreck. Johanson breathed again, and steamed out to open water. After that valiant effort he received the highest decoration for bravery awarded by the King of Sweden.

Often the *Clara* pushed her blunt nose into Knysna harbour. Johanson visited the home of John Bern, the pilot, and

in due course he married Bern's daughter Jessie.

Johanson really made his name as the safest shipmaster on the tricky run between Table Bay and Port Nolloth. This is a run notorious for fog along a coast strewn with dead ships. Other men, equipped with echo-sounding and other aids, ran their ships ashore. Johanson must have done the run six hundred times in the *Clara* between the wars without ever touching anything. "All I want is a standard compass, a lead line, a nose, ears and eyes," declared Captain Johanson. This was no figure of speech. He could smell his way along that surf-beaten coast in fog until he came to water of such colour that he knew he was approaching Port Nolloth. Then the fog-horn would guide him through the reef to the jetty. He never felt the

need for a radio direction finder. The man without a master's certificate could be relied upon to bring his ship into harbour in all weathers. Port Nolloth, I may add, is such a devilish place that one steamer became a total loss in the harbour a few years ago after being thrown by the seas out of the narrow, rocky channel leading to the jetty.

Axel Johanson became Lieutenant Johanson of the South African Navy during World War II, but he remained in command of the *Clara*. She was taken over as port examination vessel, and as H.M.S.A.S. *Clara* she patrolled the entrance to Table Bay and saw that the papers of thousands of ships were in order. After the war *Clara* was sold and used as an oyster shell dredger in the Saldanha lagoon, and later she was bought by the Salamander Bay whal-

ing company for transporting water. At the age of fiftyfour it was considered more economical to rebuild the hull and piping of the *Clara* than to buy a new ship. Johanson was placed in command of larger ships on the Port Nolloth run, the Swazi and Zulu Coast. But he always preferred his old favourite, the *Clara*, in spite of her open bridge and hand-steering gear. Axel Johanson remained at sea until a few months before his death at the age of seventy-seven. The *Clara* was still afloat when her partner crossed the bar.

Now other small craft move across the screen of memory past Salamander Bay. One of them is Steam Pinnacle No. 331, ending her days towing lighters filled with oyster-shell. In her proud youth she flew the White Ensign and mounted a light gun. When

the German cruiser *Konigsberg* sought refuge in the Rufiji River early in the German East African campaign, the pinnacle took part in the operations which ended in the destruction of the cruiser.

I seem to see the old *Chub*, too, the coaster that left her bones on a reef to the north of Saldanha Bay soon after the end of World War II. When the *Chub* was built she was fitted with special tanks to hold one hundred tons of fresh water. She steamed from the Clyde to Simon's Bay not long before the South African War. Thousands of Boer prisoners-of-war knew the *Chub*, for she ferried them out to the transports which carried them into exile in Ceylon or St. Helena. The *Chub* also filled the water-tanks of those ships. Captain Scott's old *Discovery* and later his *Terra Nova*

both took their loads of water from the *Chub* before steering south for the ice. And when Simonstown ran out of water during the drought of 1930 it was the *Chub* that saved the day by bringing fresh water from Kalk Bay to be pumped into the town reservoir.

Then the *Chub* was sold to a company which had decided to re-open the sea trade of South Africa's only broad, navigable river, the Breede River. In many places the Breede is as wide as the Thames at Tilbury. It drains the snow-capped Hex River ranges and flows into the Indian Ocean at Port Beaufort, a forgotten Cape harbour. The *Chub* was selected because she drew only four and a half feet of water and could cross the bar safely.

This enterprise was a romantic revival, for the Breede River had been opened up in the fifties of last century by the

Barry family when they placed the little steamer *Kadie* with her tall funnel on the run. There was no railway to Swellendam in those days, and the people were so pleased to see the *Kadie* that they waved flags and fired cannon. But the *Kadie* was wrecked after six years of trading. The port of Port Beaufort decayed until there was nothing but a ruined jetty and a few houses buried in the dunes. Wheat and wool were taken to Cape Town on ox-wagons, as before. Fishing boats entered the river, but few coasters were seen.

In 1908 the coasting steamer *Burton Port* paid one visit and steamed up the river for thirty miles to Malagas. Next, in 1934, came the *Chub*. She carried petrol in drums to the river, competing with the railways. Her crew did some profitable fishing on most voyages and

often brought a ton of fish back to Table Bay. Again and again she cruised round the stormy end of Africa, a small, old ship engaged in a new career. Sometimes she went as far as Mossel Bay. Her master, Captain Dumaresq, ran into violent south-east gales; but he took the *Chub* into little corners known only to coasting skippers and found shelter from the breaking seas. Sometimes the *Chub* was reported missing. She always came back.

It was the deadly Port Nolloth run that finished the old water boat. She survived the heaviest seas in the world for years, but a West Coast fog was too much for her, and in November 1945 she grounded at Cape St. Martin near the approach to St. Helena Bay. All hands reached the shore in the lifeboat. For a long time the *Chub*

remained above the surface, to the great benefit of those daring vultures of the sea who delight in removing objects of value from wrecked ships.

I have wandered away from Salamander Bay, carried off by memories of wandering ships. Sheep graze among the abandoned buildings of the forgotten backwater, wild ostriches swarm through the cemetery where Ole Olsen of Norway rests, and the master of a British ship, the small pox victims and the boy from H.M.S. *Boadicea* who fell from aloft. I think you should go through the dunes and the grain fields to Salamander Bay one day in the spring, when the wild flowers are blazing in the sailors' cemetery. There are ghosts of ships and seamen in that old harbour, but the ghosts of Salamander Bay harm no one when they strike eight bells at midnight.



Chapter Three

WHO DISCOVERED THE CAPE?

WHO was the first navigator to sight the great mass of Table Mountain against the sky? For more than four centuries the Portuguese explorer, Bartholomew Diaz, has received the credit for the discovery. There is no doubt about his famous landfall, but was he the first sailor from a foreign land to reach the Cape of Storms?

Some historians accept the legend which Herodotus recorded, describing the circumnavigation of Africa by a Phoenician fleet six hundred years before Christ. Timbers of old ships have been excavated from the sand of the Cape Flats at various times. These most intriguing relics, found miles from the sea, have been quoted by some authorities in support of the Phoenician theory. They claim that a channel ran from False Bay to Table Bay at the period of the Phoenician voyage. I shall take you to these ships on dry land and discuss this mystery in due course.

Another school of thought favours the idea of Chinese junks having visited South Africa before the Portuguese arrived. Here again not only relics of pottery are produced, but also the yellow slant-eyed Hottentots, known

to the early Dutch settlers as the “Chinese Hottentots”.

Then there are those who point to the Arabs as the pioneers in Cape seas. Arab maps drawn long before 1438, they say, depicted the southern end of Africa. Arab tradition as far back as A.D. 839 included a southern route from the Arabian Sea to the Mediterranean; and Arab geographers recorded a voyage to the Cape in A.D. 1420 by an Arab vessel.

Finally there is a Malay theory, though I do not think this merits serious discussion. I refer, of course, to the Malay seafarers of ancient times and not to the Malays imported as slaves by the Dutch East India Company. It was in February 1927 that a Malay canoe or *kabang* of the dug-out type was thrown up on the beach at Port Elizabeth. Scientists made inquiries,

and traced the canoe to the Nicobar Islands. It had floated across the Indian Ocean from that group unharmed, an interesting sidelight on the direction of ocean currents if nothing more.

Professor Schwarz, who sought the solution of more than one great South African mystery in the Kalahari Desert, believed that the strange race he found there, the Makalakas, were originally a Malay people. The Malays colonised Madagascar two thousand years ago. Some of them, with the wanderlust still burning fiercely, cruised on across the Mozambique Channel and settled in Africa – or so Schwarz thought. Makalakas means People of the Sun, a fitting name for men who came from the East. In some of their place names a Malay or

Polynesian influence has been traced by believers in the theory.

The mists of time hang darkly over these old voyages. False or true? Let us go back to the source material and see what we can make of them.

Herodotus, of course, was the Greek who lived about four centuries before Christ, and who has been called the “father of historians”. Some of his work has stood the test of time; but many errors have also been detected. His story of the Phoenician explorers has been translated in various ways, but here is a fair version:

“The shape of Libya (meaning Africa) shows that save for the part that borders on Asia it is surrounded on all sides by sea. The first to bring proof of this as far as I know was Pharaoh Necho of Egypt. When he ceased the

digging of the canal which was to link the Nile with the Red Sea he collected an expedition and recommended it to sail round Libya through the Pillars of Hercules (Straits of Gibraltar) back into the Mediterranean and so return to Egypt. Therefore the Phoenicians left port and sailed out of the Indian Ocean into the southern sea. When autumn fell they landed and tilled the fields and waited for the harvest in whatever part of Libya they happened to be. When they had harvested the corn they sailed on until after two years they sailed through the Pillars of Hercules and so returned to Egypt again in the third year. They related that which I myself cannot believe, though perhaps some other may, that as they rounded Libya they beheld the sun on their right hand.”

No doubt Pharaoh Necho employed Phoenicians as explorers because they were the greatest seamen and merchants in the Old World of their day. That they voyaged far beyond the Straits of Gibraltar in the west and certainly eastwards as far as India is certain. In quest of gold and spices, they sailed to Sierra Leone and beyond. But the evidence that they circumnavigated Africa is limited to the legend set down by Herodotus – and the ships on the Cape Flats.

It is a thousand pities that Herodotus did not mention the origin of the story. Some have said that he disbelieved it, but this is incorrect. He rejected only the detail about the sun on the right hand – a detail, by the way, which has about it the ring of truth and which influenced many historians to accept the legend as fact.

Herodotus was probably recording all that remained of about a century and a half of spoken tradition. One might have expected the daring Phoenicians to have returned with a saga of encounters with wild animals and wilder peoples, and escapes from many perils of the sea. Yet even the name of the leader had been lost when Herodotus heard the simple narrative.

The reference to the sun's position meant that it appeared to the north of them at noon instead of to the south, which naturally made an impression on them. Yet this should not have come as a tremendous surprise to Phoenician navigators. The same thing is observed on occasion in the southern part of the Red Sea, where Phoenician seamen had travelled previously.

Critics have suggested that the Phoenicians knew they would be put to death by Pharaoh Necho if they returned without sailing round Africa; so they invented a story, and mentioned the known fact about the sun as proof that they had obeyed orders. If this theory is valid, what did they do with their ships?

Captain Alan Villiers, a master mariner with great experience of sailing small craft in the Indian Ocean, at first accepted the Phoenician voyage, but later became dubious. One lucky ship may have rounded Africa, he decided, but he thought the odds were against it. She would have had a terrific battle to get round the Cape of Good Hope, with few sheltered harbours available, and those unknown.

More accurate maps of Africa might have been expected after a Phoenician

circumnavigation. Only in the first century after Christ was evidence secured to show that Africa extended as far as the equator, and earlier maps showed a very small African continent.

Ptolemy, the ancient geographer, declared in A.D. 150 that Africa took a great curve to the east and linked up with Far Eastern lands. He lived at Alexandria, and should have known of any Phoenician voyage. The fact that he was unaware of it is strong evidence against such a voyage.

Other critics have pointed out that if you allow two rest periods each of six months for sowing corn, the time mentioned by Herodotus would be too short for a voyage of thirteen thousand miles. Moreover, the crops would not flourish in unfamiliar soil, while the Phoenicians themselves must have

been menaced by savages, elephants, baboons, locusts and tropical diseases.

Defenders of the Phoenicians have drawn up a plausible reconstruction of the adventure. The ships, they argue, were powerful fifty-oared craft, able to cover fifty miles a day. They could also sail before the wind. If they averaged only twenty-five miles a day they would have covered the distance within three years, allowing a total of twelve months for raising corn. Drake sailed round the world in three years.

They knew the coast and the weather conditions as far as Cape Guardafui. Leaving the head of the Red Sea in November, they would row to Guardafui; then the north-east monsoon astern would carry them down to the Mozambique Channel. Currents would favour them all the way to the Cape of Good Hope. There they might have a

hard struggle, though it is easier for a ship to round the Cape from east to west than it is in the reverse direction.

Once round the Cape the south-east trades would help them to the equator under sail. After that it would be a struggle again for the oarsmen as far as the Straits of Gibraltar, as they would have to fight the north-east trades for a long way. Back in the Mediterranean, however, they would sail fast over the last lap in familiar waters.

Their first crop may have been sown near St. Helena Bay (near Saldanha) in June, seven months after leaving Egypt. They would reap in November, sail in December, and sow a second crop in December the following year.

Sailing vessels have always found the east to west passage round Africa

easier than west to east. Could it have been done without a compass? Phoenicians never had the mariner's compass for any of their voyages. The trade winds and the African coastline enabled them to fix their position. No doubt they lost some of their ships when they sailed too close to new and dangerous coasts; but one ship at least survived. Or so the champions of the Phoenicians assert. And the fact that the Phoenicians were the sailors of the legend supports the whole theory, for these great Semitic navigators were the only Mediterranean sailors who could have carried out such a feat.

They dominated the sea trade routes of their world. All their discoveries were kept secret for trade reasons; and so, even when they sailed round Africa, little became known of the achievement. Phoenician coins of the fourth

century B.C. were found at Corvo in the Azores not long ago. If they could sail to the Azores they could make the series of coastwise passages which would take them round Africa.

It was inevitable that the Phoenician theory should have been recalled when fragments of an old ship – possibly an ancient ship – were found on the Cape Flats early last century. As you know, the great mountain ridge of the Cape Peninsula is joined to the African continent by the wide, low and wind-swept dune area known as the Cape Flats. This is not all sand. There are vleis and rivers which spread out in winter. It looks as though the Table Mountain range once stood on an island, with the sea running across the present Cape Flats from Table Bay to False Bay. I shall have to revert to that point later.

George Thompson, an observant Cape Town merchant who rode about the country and described his travels vividly, seems to have been the first person to describe in any detail a ship on the Cape Flats. He did not claim to be the discoverer; but writing in 1827 he stated that “there was discovered a few years ago what seemed to be the timbers of a vessel deeply imbedded in the sand”. Thompson suggested that it might be the remains of some ancient Phoenician vessel wrecked when the Cape Flats were under water.

Captain W. F. W. Owen, the naval officer who charted much of the South African coast, visited the spot with Thompson, and also formed the opinion that this was an ancient ship. He thought the timbers were cedar. The Phoenicians, of course, were at home on the present Syrian coast, and

would have used the famous cedars of Lebanon for ship building.

This wreck, or another one, came into prominence again in the middle of last century, when Charles Bell, the surveyor-general, examined it and reported to Lieut.-Governor C. H. Darling as follows: “However extraordinary it may seem, I am compelled to believe that this wood is part of a large vessel upward of seventy feet in length, wrecked when the sea washed up to some of the ancient sea beaches ... now raised hundreds of feet in height above the present high-water mark and left at least ten miles from the sea. This wreck seems to have been washed open by a change in the course of the Hardekraaltje stream about thirty years ago. When first seen the ribs and knees stood five feet above the stiff clay surface, partially

connected by the planks of one side. They were broken off and carried away. A wagon-load of the timber was sent to England, but could not be identified. Iron bolts were found, but no copper.”

Bell reminded the governor of accounts of the circumnavigation of Africa “while the Pyramids were yet new” and asked permission to disinter the ship carefully. Darling encouraged him in this project and allowed £20 for expenses. Unfortunately the Cape Archives contain no further details of this work. Moreover it is not easy to fix the position of the ship (or ships) because of the absence of landmarks on the Cape Flats. We have only Bell’s mention of the Hardekraaltje river, and the distance of ten miles from the sea.

No more was heard of ships in the dunes until 1880, when a ship was found six feet below the surface while workmen were taking out gravel and making bricks. This spot was several miles from the sea, near Number One platform of Woltemade cemetery. Thus it could not have been the ship that Thompson described.

The timber of the Woltemade ship had a peculiar smell, but it burnt well and sold easily as firewood. So much of it was found that months passed before the whole ship had been excavated, chopped up and sent to Cape Town in wagons for sale. Unfortunately there does not appear to have been any scientific examination of the relics at the time. You can imagine the cry of anguish which would have been heard in Europe if the thousand-year-old Viking ships found in Norway last

century had gone up in smoke. Yet there was a fascinating relic, possibly older than the Viking ships, going into the stoves of Cape Town without a word of protest.

Not until 1924 was this Woltemade find investigated. By then; of course, the actual timber had gone. Colonel Graham Botha, the archivist, heard the story from a cemetery official. Belated news of the find also came to the ears of Mr. J. H. Hofmeyr, then head of Witwatersrand University, who encouraged Professor Raymond Dart to gather all possible evidence. With the aid of a high railway official, Dart located and interviewed two old men who had helped to dig up the ship.

One man had a clear recollection of a mast, about three feet six inches in diameter. The ship itself was about six feet below the surface. Estimates of

length varied from seventy to one hundred and eighty feet. Her beam appeared to have been generous. Iron rings and bolts were also found.

So you have two mysteries. Was it an ancient ship of the Phoenicians or other seafarers? And how did a ship of that size reach a site several miles from the shore of Table Bay?

Some geologists deny that the Cape Peninsula was once an island. They say that the marine sands on the surface of the Cape Flats were deposited by strong winds. Marine fossils, which should be present on the Flats, are absent.

Other authorities are of the opinion that even though there may have been no great sheet of water two thousand years ago, there must have been a fairly wide channel between False Bay

and Table Bay. I support the channel theory. After all, Dr. Leonard Gill of the South African Museum identified the skeleton of a rorqual whale on the Cape Flats in a quarry near Maitland some years ago. It was a complete skeleton which had to come to rest there in one piece. Dr. Gill regarded this discovery as clear evidence of a rise in level of the Cape Flats of at least twelve feet in fairly recent geological times.

Yes, the Cape Flats were wholly or partly under water at one time, and a Phoenician ship may have left its bones far inland. It has been suggested that the Woltemade ship may have used a river which altered its course within the past two or three hundred years. I know the old Dutch seamen used to anchor in the Diep and Salt rivers which have now silted up; but

you will search the archives in vain for a description of a Cape Flats river that would carry a large sailing vessel as far inland as the Woltemade ship.

Those discoveries on the Cape Flats were mysteries indeed. But the brooms of time, the stinging south-east gales and merciless winter rains, have swept away the last age-blackened fragments which might have provided some clue to the lost ships. I can only say that if the Phoenicians sailed round Africa, they made the greatest voyage of all time.

Where are we to place the Chinese as sea explorers in South African waters? Their junks were certainly visiting East African ports early in the fifteenth century; and they may have been there very much earlier. Sir Mortimer Wheeler, the archaeologist, remarked that the buried history of

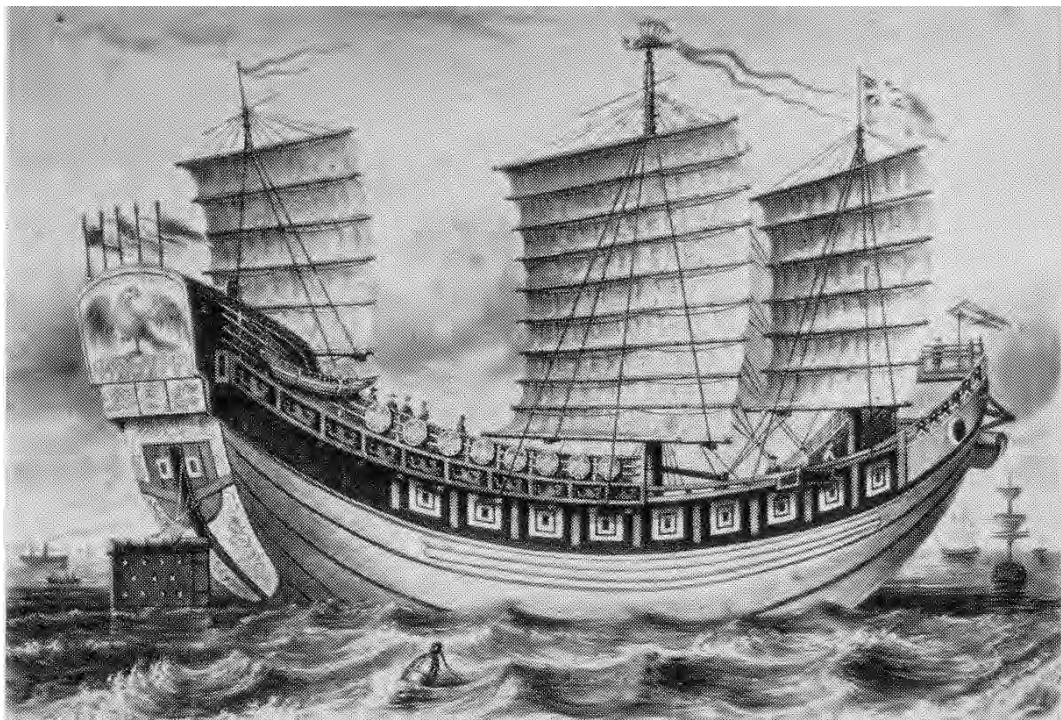
Tanganyika was written in Chinese porcelain.

Several early travellers in South Africa noticed physical resemblances between the Bushman and Hottentot races and the Chinese. Porcelain, clearly of Chinese origin, late Sung to early Ming (twelfth to fourteenth century) crops up all the way down the East African coast. MacIver and Caton-Thompson found medieval Chinese porcelain in the Rhodesian ruins. A Chinese coin which came to light in Southern Rhodesia not long ago was stated to have been found in an ancient mine-working. Professor Raymond Dart claimed that certain queer hats shown in Bushman paintings were really Chinese hats. These hats are seen in paintings as far south as the Kei River near East London. Fragments of Chinese pottery

have been found in the Northern Transvaal; and one piece of Chinese porcelain was picked up recently near the coast in the Lower Congo. That does not prove that a Chinese junk rounded the Cape and reached the Congo, but it is interesting in view of other links in the chain.

Chinese junks were seaworthy craft, and there is convincing evidence that they were capable of weathering the Cape of Storms. They carried primitive compasses. They were fully decked, at a time when the ancient Britons were paddling their coracles. With eyes in the bows and dragons across their high sterns, they took little heed of the devils of the strange waters they invaded.

A junk named *Keying* left Canton in 1846, bound for England. She rounded the Cape in winter, running into very



The junk Keying which sailed from Canton, round the Cape to London, in the middle of last century.

heavy weather; but her master claimed that she never shipped a sea or leaked a drop. *Keying* had masts and rudder of ironwood, watertight compartments, and a gaily-decorated main saloon thirty feet long and twenty-five feet wide. She reached the Thames by way of New York after a voyage of seventeen months.

So it is no flight of fancy to picture a Chinese junk of several hundreds of tons burden steering a southerly course along the coast of Africa many centuries ago. She would have no tinned provisions; but herbs and ginger would be growing in barrels on her decks, close to the fragrant joss-house. And in any case the Chinese prefer well-matured delicacies. How many men she carried cannot be guessed. The Chinese records state that a ship's company in a large junk often number-

ed hundreds of men, half sailors and half soldiers. No doubt there were brass carronades on board, and opium, and crackers to scare away any Flying Dutchman of Chinese mythology.

But this was long before the day when the Flying Dutchman first began his hopeless beat off the Cape of Storms as penance for his blasphemy. The Chinese had not even that legend to guide them. If indeed they fared south of Cape Corrientes, the edge of their known world, they must have gone unwillingly. Strong currents run in the Mozambique Channel; and a junk driven before the north-east monsoon might find herself unable to beat back to the familiar harbours of the east coast.

Sailing directions for the south and east coasts of Africa show clearly what would happen to such a junk,

partially disabled, perhaps, in those circumstances. She would be swept southwards from Cape Corrientes until the warm Agulhas current gripped her. Then she would drift on in a body of water moving, as the pilot book says, with “considerable velocity”, until she came to the Agulhas bank.

A portion of the Agulhas current passes round and over the southern part of the Agulhas bank, setting north-westward again past the Cape of Good Hope. Then it is joined by the icy Antarctic current which makes a desert of so much coast along the south-west shore of Africa.

With that north-flowing current the junk would go. We may reasonably imagine the Chinese (some of their fatalism having deserted them) beating their gongs and rattling off many a prayer as the low, unknown coast slid

by. Somewhere in Namaqualand, near where the town of Port Nolloth now stands, near the rich diamond terraces at the mouth of the Orange River, the remorseless inshore current would cast the junk on the rocks – or more mercifully perhaps, on a sandy beach.

So far this is all mere theory. Now we must examine the Hottentots who are believed by some authorities to reveal characteristics which are plainly Chinese. When the first Dutch settlers at the Cape made contact with these people during their expeditions in search of Vigiti Magna and the land of gold, they called them the “Chinese Hottentots”. For these descendants of castaways seemed to be different from the Hottentots of other parts of the coast. They had the slit eyes of the Oriental. They were, in the picturesque

language of the Dutch explorers “the colour of guinea-gold”.

Even their language was different. A primitive race, such as the Bushman, invariably possesses a small vocabulary and a low form of speech. Clicks, snores and warbles, almost animal sounds, make up the Bushman tongue. These “Chinese Hottentots”, however, used inflexions in tone such as are found only in a more cultured language than wretched Hottentots could have evolved – in Chinese, in fact. Other similarities between the present-day language of the Namaquas and Chinese have been noted. .

Such is the theory elaborated by Professor Schwarz, Professor Dart and others. According to Schwarz, the Chinese visits to South Africa. came to an end about the year AD. 1270 when the Gujerat pirates refused to allow the

junks to pass. And so the years rolled on until the *Keying* sailed in the tracks of the old junks. Possibly the story is told in log-books pigeon-holed in the Chinese archives, in ballads and untranslated classics. Perhaps no junk that rounded the Cape ever returned to China.

Now for the Arabs. Historians have searched the literature of reliable early Arab travellers in vain for any knowledge of Africa south of Sofala. Their maps show nothing resembling the true shape of South Africa. And their ships (unlike the junks) were not strong enough to survive the battering they would have encountered off the Cape of Storms. Most of the Arab dhows were “stitched” with coir, not fastened with nails.

Ahmad ibn Majid, the famous Arab pilot who showed Vasco da Gama the

way from Malindi in East Africa to India in 1498, was the author of a number of nautical manuals. If there had been even a legend of an Arab voyage to the Cape of Good Hope, this man would have known of it. Yet here are Ahmad ibn Majid's own words on the subject of the East African coast south of the last harbour used by the Arabs: "There is nothing to the south except reefs and darkness which the Creator alone knows."

Conventional historians deny all these romantic legends of Phoenicians, Chinese and Arabs. Ancient coins found in South Africa were stolen from collections, they say, and not dropped or buried by Eastern explorers. They argue (with some truth) that a theory may easily win popular approval if it appeals to popular sentiment. If the Bushmen and Hottentots

have Mongolian blood in them, they must have acquired it before they started their long trek down Africa to the Cape. The ancients sought their gold in Arabia and their ivory in Somaliland, and it was not until medieval times that invaders worked the Rhodesian gold.

I regard these old voyages as "not proven". The last chance of a sensational discovery was lost in 1880, when that ship on the Cape Flats was sacrificed to provide fuel for the stoves and grates of Cape Town. Now we shall never know whether the Phoenician voyage was an idle fable or sober narrative. And how I would love to learn the manner in which a large wooden sailing ship came to rest under the white, stinging sand of the Cape Flats miles from the sea.



Chapter Four

LOST WITHOUT TRACE

*My fate, O Stranger, was to drown;
And where it was the ship went
down*

Is what the sea-birds know.
E. A. Robinson.

So many ships have vanished without trace in South African waters that it is surprising to find the *Waratah* story

still being told over and over again. I suppose the loss of a liner with nearly one hundred passengers on board horrified the public to such an extent that far deeper sea mysteries involving other types of ships have been ignored.

Here, at all events, are unsolved mysteries which many of you will now encounter for the first time. Only too often the sea does not reveal its secrets or give up its dead.

No doubt there were shiploads of Portuguese explorers who failed to return from their adventures, but I have no record of them. The first English ships to anchor in a South African harbour, Admiral George Raymond's fleet, provide the first mystery. They were the flagship *Penelope*, the *Merchant Royal* and the *Edward Bonaventure*; and it was in the winter of 1591 that they put into

Saldanha suffering heavily from scurvy. Soon the crews were shooting birds and fishing. Later they traded cattle with the Hottentots. Some recovered from the scurvy, but many died. Admiral Raymond sent the *Merchant Royal* back to England, while he sailed eastwards for India with *Bonaventure*.

Four days after leaving Table Bay the two ships plunged into a gale. Night fell, the seas ran high; and Captain Lancaster of the *Bonaventure* lost sight of his admiral's lights. Lancaster lived to become a famous Arctic explorer. Admiral Raymond and his crew of one hundred men in *Penelope* were never seen again.³ It was strange

that one ship should live while another, seaworthy and well-manned, should disappear only a mile or two away.

Simon van der Stel lost a son, Cornelis, in a missing ship. She was the *Ridderschap*, and in January 1694 she left Table Bay for Batavia. Two years passed, she did not arrive, and the Governor must have given up all hope of seeing his son again. However, the master of an English brigantine called at the Cape and reported that he had heard vague

1797; and then the famous frigate *Penelope* of 1798 commanded by Nelson's friend Blackwood. Another *Penelope* chased the slaves in West African waters, took part in the Crimean war, and served on the Cape Station. Then came the iron clad *Penelope*, described in a later chapter of this book entitled "The Prison Hulks".

³ This was the first of a number of British men-o'-war to be named *Penelope*. There was a privateer named *Penelope* in 1667; a frigate in 1778; another frigate in 1783; a cutter in

stories of the *Ridderschap* being shipwrecked on the Madagascar coast and looted by pirates. Van der Stel sent the slaving vessel *Soldat* to investigate the rumour, but nothing was found.

Fresh rumours of Cornelis van der Stel living in the interior of Madagascar came later; and a copy of Simon van der Stel's letter to a native potentate named Cin Cive, asking for information, may be seen in the Cape Archives. No reply was received, so Simon van der Stel ordered the yacht *Tamboer* to make another search. She, too, failed in her quest, and the fate of the *Ridderschap* remains a complete mystery.

Again and again one hears of ships disappearing on short voyages within sight of land. Such a one was the Dutch packet *Schuylenburg*, which

was sailing round from Table Bay to Simon's Bay one June night two centuries ago when she vanished. Not a fragment of the *Schuylenburg* washed ashore.

A fine ship of the English East India Company, the *William Pitt*, left Table Bay in December 1818 for India and was lost with all hands. A box of letters and some passengers' trunks floated ashore near Algoa Bay, but there was nothing to explain her disappearance. Only six years later the sloop *Julia* sailed out of Port Natal with eleven people who had decided not to settle there. It would have been better if they had remained on shore, for the *Julia* never made port.

A year passed and the schooner *Bridekirk* left the Kowie river for Algoa Bay. Sir Rufane Donkin, the Acting Governor, had ordered the

building of this ship to open up trade along the coast. For two years she carried farm produce out of the river. Then she left the Kowie for the last time; and the rest is silence. Another ill-fated schooner in the Kowie trade was the *Francis*, owned by the government. She left the river for Cape Town not long after the *Bridekirk*. She was supposed to have foundered in a gale.

One may expect small coasters to be overwhelmed by the sea now and again, but the loss of a man-o'-war is another matter. Naval authorities last century were baffled by the complete disappearance of three men-o'-war in South African waters.

First there was H.M.S. *Martin*, carrying twenty guns, which was supposed to have foundered off the Cape in 1826. About thirty years later H.M.S. *Nerbudda*, a brig with sixteen

guns, sailed from Algoa Bay for the Cape with Commander H. A. Kerr as her captain. Apparently she had been in China seas and had been damaged. She never arrived at the Cape. A memorial at Simonstown to her thirteen officers and one hundred men states that "terrific gales soon after blew and the vessel has not been heard of since". Finally there was H.M.S. *Sappho*, which left Cape Town in 1858 for Australia and shared the mysterious fate of *Martin* and *Nerbudda*. The Admiralty sent a steamer in search of *Sappho* but she returned without a clue.

A little cutter named *Circe* deserved better luck than the unknown tragedy which finished her. She sailed all the way from London to Table Bay by herself in 1834, navigated by the

master and two boys. This vessel of only twenty-two tons braved all the vicissitudes of the weather on the run between the Cape and Port Natal for a year. Captain Allen Gardiner, R.N., explorer and missionary, went down to see her leave Port Natal one day and entrusted some of his valuable records of travel to a passenger. He lost his manuscripts, to the regret of historians. All on board lost their lives, and not a fragment of the *Circe* was ever identified.

A schooner named *Montagu* vanished off the Cape about the middle of last century. She had left Table Bay for the Kowie. Wreckage found on the beach at Chapman's Bay may have formed part of the *Montagu*. The year 1850 was unusually stormy. Twenty ships were lost along the South African coast; and in two of these no one

survived to tell the tale. Bodies of a woman and child and some bales of wool, found near Saldanha Bay, were supposed to have come from the iron schooner *British Settler*, bound from Cape Town to London. Twenty bodies washed up at Cape St. Francis probably came from the *Queen of the West*, a ship of eleven hundred tons. Nine years later the famous little Cape coasting schooner *Rosebud* sailed away and never returned. The coasters *Mary Jenkins* and the *Leonine Mary* also vanished mysteriously at this period.

I have dealt in some detail elsewhere⁴ with a deep mystery of the eighteenthies, the total disappearance of the Cape schooner *Maria Frederika* on the short passage between Table Bay and

⁴ In my book "So Few Are Free"

St. Helena Bay. This disaster was made all the more memorable by a dream in which Mr. Stephan, the owner, saw the ship going down. He ordered the coast to be searched. Nothing was found at the time, but two years later some timber was picked up which may have belonged to the lost schooner.

The *Maria Frederika* had sailed to Mauritius and elsewhere in safety for years. She had a small cargo of dates, raisins, potatoes, sugar, rice and other stores for the Stephan fishing stations along the coast. I looked up her manifest in the newspapers of the period, and discovered that she had four bags of gunpowder for Lambert's Bay – which may conceivably have had some bearing on the disaster. Her captain was the redoubtable Manie Fernandez, ancestor of the well-known

Cape racing family. The schooner was last seen running comfortably before the south-easter. I find it hard to believe that the sea alone was too much for this trim schooner.

Another ship which vanished within sight of Table Mountain was the Norwegian steam whaler *Mosvalla*. She was on passage from Saldanha Bay to Table Bay with a crew of ten men, early in World War I, when she disappeared. It was not due to enemy action, for no raiders had yet appeared in Cape waters. A strong south-east gale arose two days after the *Mosvalla* left Saldanha. She may have been drifting with her engines disabled when the gale struck her. Steam whalers are among the most seaworthy craft afloat, however, and the *Mosvalla* must have suffered from

some deadly weakness if she foundered in the south-easter.

Later in World War I the coasting steamer *Eros* disappeared with all hands. She was running between Table Bay and Port Nolloth at the time with Captain Robert Brooks in command, a mate, chief engineer and eleven others. Her cargo was coke for a copper mine. One of her lifeboats was sighted and taken in tow by Miguel Gonçalves and his son John, who were out fishing from Lambert's Bay. The boat carried one dead man, a negro.

Captain W. H. Harris, master mariner and marine superintendent of the Union Castle Company in Cape Town, went to Lambert's Bay to investigate the mystery. His firm operated the *Eros*, and he recognised the negro as a man who had signed on as a fireman. Medical evidence suggested that the

negro had died from exposure. But why was he alone in the boat? The *Eros* had left Cape Town five days before the discovery of the lifeboat. Had all his shipmates died in the few days before Gonçalves and his son found this body? There was not a clue to the mystery of the *Eros* in that lifeboat, and now the fate of the coaster must remain unexplained for ever.

South African coasters were not equipped with wireless during World War I. The first passenger ship with wireless in South African waters was the Rennie liner *Inkosi*, in 1905, and even in those far off days she could make herself heard for some hundreds of miles. But for years after that, passenger liners and freighters went to sea without wireless; and so a few ships vanished without a word. Since

the wireless era, of course, such mysteries have become rare indeed. Only in wartime, as a rule, is a ship destroyed so quickly that her operator is unable to send out a distress call.

Among the silent South African victims of the sea during World War I was the coasting steamer *Burton Port*. I photographed her once when I was a schoolboy. She lay moored often beside the *Nautilus*, which was about the same size, among the small craft in the inner basin. The *Burton Port* served the Stephan brothers well for many years. She took part in many salvage adventures and also the hunt for the treasure ship *Xema* off the South West African coast. Another firm bought her in 1916, and she worked between the ports of East Africa on war service. One day she left Beira for Chinde and was seen no

more. The small Zanzibar steamer *Kilwa* had previously disappeared somewhere off the same coast, but the court of inquiry held in Durban found that she had been overloaded.

Years passed after World War I without a baffling sea mystery in South African waters. Those who went to the Antarctic with the *Tafelberg* expedition of 1934, however, will remember the strange disappearance of the whale catcher *Berea*. She was one of the little fleet working with the South African factory ship, and she carried twelve men. One day she was missing and failed to reply to wireless calls. A dozen catchers then searched the whale hunting area thoroughly. After two days a dead whale was found. In the flesh was a harpoon bearing the mark of the *Berea*, and round the tail was a broken towing

chain. Was the chain broken when the *Berea* went down?

A staunch coasting steamer which survived half a century of battering along the South African coast was the *Agnar*, known everywhere between Walvis Bay and Durban. She was sold for the island trade in the Indian Ocean, and not long before World War II she left Madagascar for Mauritius with thirty-four souls on board. A cyclone raged across her track. The little *Agnar* never reached Port Louis. A damaged hatch cover picked up at sea by one of the search vessels may have been all that remained afloat when the *Agnar* foundered.

A small South African victim of World War II was the coaster *Harrier*, once well known as a sealer. She sailed from Durban for East Africa with a full cargo of gelignite. Her

master, Captain Riseborough, received a posthumous “mention in dispatches”. It was believed that she had encountered an enemy raider or submarine, for nothing was heard of her after she left Durban.

So we are left guessing, more or less intelligently, about the mysteries of missing ships. Some blew up, no doubt, before the boats could be lowered. Fire must have burnt other missing ships down to the waterline, so that nothing remained afloat but the lifeboats – and they were engulfed later by the merciless sea. Many cargoes are dangerous. Spontaneous combustion in the bunkers has destroyed fine ships. If a boiler explodes the side of the ship may be blown out.

Sometimes the propeller shaft breaks in mid-ocean. If the fracture occurs

very near the stern the propeller may be dropped, leaving a large hole for the water to rush through the shaft tunnel into the engine-room.

Some of the missing schooners on the Cape coast would probably have survived if there had been more hands to man the pumps. Those small craft and many larger ones had no water-tight bulkheads. In steam and sail the old-fashioned hatches, were a great source of weakness. Tons of water crashed on deck, the hatches were stove in, and the sea filled one large hold.

The landsman who hears of a missing ship often assumes that she has capsized. Ships have rolled over, usually as a result of ballast or cargo shifting. Faulty design in ships is a rarity, though far too common in modern aircraft.

One of the hazards of the South African coast, especially the stretch between the Cape and Durban, is the huge, unexpected cross sea which comes up on the beam and breaks clean over bridge and boat deck. A recent example was the damage done to the seven thousand ton British freighter *Trevean* early in September 1958 while she was steaming between Durban and East London.

She left Durban in fine, clear weather. Three hours later she was pitching into a full gale. The seas came from dead ahead. Suddenly an enormous "curler" rose to starboard, struck the ship with great force, smashed the heavy teak woodwork on the bridge, stove in two lifeboats and buckled three ventilators over the engine-room. Cabins were flooded. The master dared not leave the bridge, and remained there for

thirty-six hours at a stretch. That one great sea caused damage which delayed the *Trevean* for days when she reached Table Bay.

Shipmasters believe that these dangerous seas are formed by a combination of wind and current. Many ships bound from Durban to Cape Town shape a course along the one-hundred fathom line, where the strong Mozambique current helps them along, flowing at the rate of as much as five knots. This line, however, is the edge of the continental shelf. When a westerly gale rages, the wind strikes the southerly current and throws up the type of sea which took the *Trevean* by surprise.

Go back for nearly a century to a grim scene in Table Bay, and you will understand how wind and sea can kill a ship in a matter of seconds. The

schooner *Wasp* is running before a south-east gale. She has passed the breakwater, and then Captain Munro decides to put back. The *Wasp* comes up into the wind, and heels as she beats up towards the Tygerberg hills. Now she has been flattened by the wind. She does not recover. Onlookers at the docks see her keel. Then the *Wasp* has gone, with her captain and six men. There is no mystery about the *Wasp*.

I have no doubt that most of the ships lost without trace off the South African coast were overwhelmed by heavy weather. But there were some, I think, that were destroyed by fire or ice.

Fire or ice! Here are two real terrors of the sea for you. Listen to the tales of those who survived fire and ice.

Chapter Five

FIRE AND ICE

FIRE at sea brought twenty-seven men, women and children, and the corpse of a small boy, to the Namaqualand coast one hundred and twenty years ago. This was a drama far more heart-rending than the “Skeleton Coast” episode of World War II, but it is still an unknown story. It was a miracle that any of those people, tormented by thirst in the open boats and in the Namaqualand desert long ago, should have survived the ordeal.

Thanks to a logbook kept by Captain Adam Yule, master of the brig *Australia*, the narrative comes to life as clearly as though the victims were talking. The diary reached the National Library of Scotland in Edinburgh, and I found a copy in the British Museum library in London.

Further research in the Cape Town newspapers of the period and the Cape archives enabled me to fill all the gaps in the narrative.

I know the coast where those poor souls landed. It is now the diamond coast, guarded so carefully that no one would escape observation for long. But in the past it was a “Dead Man’s Coast” indeed, as isolated and dangerous as the “Skeleton Coast” to the north. The old Dutch seamen dreaded the whole waterless stretch to the north of St. Helena Bay. There the *Goude Buys* was lost; and of seven men sent on shore to fetch help, five died of hunger and thirst. There too, the hooker *Meteren* ran ashore. Five men were drowned, eighteen reached the shore, but only nine arrived in civilisation. Thirst claimed the other nine.

Captain Yule never imagined any such danger when he sailed from Leith on October 2, 1840 in command of the new and well-equipped brig *Australia*. He had two mates, a carpenter, steward, cook, four seamen and three young apprentices as crew. The five cabin passengers included a Dr. Alexander Byers and three young women; while in the steerage there were five men and a young orphan family named Chisholm, two boys and three girls.

It was a dangerous cargo the *Australia* carried; turpentine, vitriol, sulphur, tar and coal, with some wine and spirits. Nevertheless, Captain Yule followed the insane custom of the period and neglected to keep his lifeboats ready for use. The long boat, most important of all, was used as a stall for two live bulls! You will soon realise, however,

that in every other way Yule was a fine seaman and a courageous leader.

After a call at Rio the *Australia* steered across the South Atlantic for the Cape. She was running before a strong, fair wind with all sails set on the evening of December 27, and was about six hundred miles from Cape Town. The passengers walked on deck as usual, then retired to their cabins out of the cold. Before nine the captain gave the mate his night orders and went below. In the passage he smelt burning. He thought one of the women had set alight to something in her cabin. However, his investigation showed that the whole cargo was ablaze. "The interior of the vessel was like the womb of a volcano," Yule wrote in his log. "It was impossible to put out the fire. I saw that the ship was doomed."

Captain Yule lost no time in telling his passengers that in spite of the heavy sea that was running they would have to take to the boats. Some were frantic with terror. Others tormented him with questions. The rest remained silent and trembling, smitten dumb in the presence of death.

First the seamen had to drive the bulls out of the long boat and sling them into the sea. One bull went berserk, and valuable time was lost in securing and killing it. By the time the boat had been unlashed and the tackles hooked on for launching, the smoke had become so dense that it was impossible for the men at the davits to breathe. They had to run in and out of the smoke. However, the long boat went over the side at last and was made fast to the stern, where the air was clearer. Even there the passengers

were blinded by smoke. The ship was rolling heavily. Flames were pouring out of the fore-hatch and the decks were blistering under-foot.

In that ghastly situation Captain Yule remembered everything that should have been done before the ship left Scotland. He ordered the steward to provision the boats while the mate rolled two water-casks aft along the deck. The rigging and sails were alight by this time, but the passengers were calm and the children did not cry. Then the mate clambered down into the long boat to help the sailors take on the heavy water-casks.

One cask fell into the sea and was lost. The other dropped on to the mate and a seaman, bruising them severely; but this cask was saved.

A skiff was launched, and Captain Yule put the three women into it with two seamen to look after them. It soon became obvious that the skiff was overloaded. This was partly due to the fact that two men passengers had hidden themselves under some canvas below the seats.

Yule and six others were still on board. They launched a small boat from the main deck, and Yule lingered for a moment surveying the frightening destruction of his ship. "I stood, the last living thing among the glare of the burning mass," he wrote. "The mainmast fell as I got into the boat."

Night had fallen. Yule was hoping that the boats might remain fast to the burning ship until dawn, when some vessel which had been attracted by the fire might rescue them. However, the

lines between ship and boat caught alight, and at midnight the three open boats were drifting separately.

Yule noted at this time that the fire had probably been caused by spontaneous combustion in the coal. (Later he informed Mr. J. van Ryneveld, civil commissioner at Clanwilliam, that the chafing of deals and the cargo through heavy rolling, or the breaking of vitriol bottles, might have been responsible.)

On the first night Yule took charge of the long boat. There were seven in the skiff and four in the small boat. But the small boat nearly capsized during the night, and so her people had to transfer to the other boats while she was set adrift. That made nineteen in the long boat and nine in the skiff. Both were deep in the water. And they were a long way from land.

Daylight brought no friendly sail, so Yule took stock of his resources. He had thirty gallons of water, half a gallon of rum, half a gallon of brandy, a few bottles of wine and some wine glasses. He estimated that it would not be prudent to issue each person with more than one wineglass of water a day; and in this he proved to be remarkably correct. Two small bags of bread had been saved, but some of this had been damaged by salt water. Two hams, two cheeses and a few canisters of preserved meat completed the list. Yule had taken his sextant, chronometer, nautical almanac and chart with him. He had a Bible and psalm book. Flannel shirts and blankets had been stowed in the skiff.

At six in the morning Yule informed everyone that they would be on short rations because it might take ten or

twelve days to reach the coast. Then they improvised sails, using oars for masts, and ran before the south-west wind.

Yule had to wash out the long boat, which was filthy after being used as a cattle-stall. The spray came over at first, but the carpenter rigged a bulwark of blankets on the weather side to give more shelter.

“The people pleaded for water, but I refused,” Yule recorded. “The cries for water were heart-rending, especially the children in the skiff. They did not want food. Water was the only cry. Some began to drink salt water in spite of my warnings. Two people in my boat and two in the other became delirious. They were the ones who had taken salt water. All I could do was to issue the water three times a day, one

table spoon being the ration for each person at a time.”

Often they were drenched by the spray. The chronometer was put out of action; but Yule, a skilful navigator, was still able to find his latitude and fix his position by dead-reckoning. Yule and the mate steered the long boat, though most of the work fell on Yule owing to the mate's injuries. One night the long boat shipped a heavy sea. She would probably have foundered if Yule had not foreseen the danger and ordered the men to keep buckets close to them for baling.

At dawn on the ninth day the people in the skiff hailed Yule and informed him that the orphan boy John Chisholm had died during the night. Four people in Yule's boat were gravely ill. One of them, George Peat, was dying.

However, when the sun rose that morning it showed the hills behind the Namaqualand coast. The shore was twelve miles away, and they were closing in with it fast. Everyone stared eagerly and thought of the same question. Was there safety ahead, and fresh water – or death in the surf?

Yule ordered the small skiff to go on ahead and search for a safe landing. It seemed a hopeless task on that rock-bound coast where tremendous breakers were crashing and no opening appeared. Mercifully the wind and the heavy ground swell from the southwest went down as they approached the shore. The skiff ran for a narrow channel. It struck a rock, and some fell overboard. Lightened in this way, the skiff was carried right up on the beach. All came safely through the surf.

Yule followed with the long boat, unaware of the fact that the skiff's crew were trying to signal him to land elsewhere. He took their warning signs for encouragement, and dashed among the breakers into the channel. He, too, collided with the rock and the long boat remained fast on it. There was deep water between boat and shore. Yule urged everyone to jump overboard before the next wave engulfed them. The seamen saved the women and children. Just after landing the storm burst again and the boats were thrown far up on the beach. They were safe for the moment, with their remaining food and water intact – but with the body of little John Chisholm, and the dying George Peat.

Captain Yule had discovered by means of his sextant that they were about eleven miles north of the Olifant's

River mouth, which is about two hundred miles from Cape Town by road. Life now depended on finding water on the spot or marching to the river. It seemed like madness to remain on that beach; yet the leader was forced to stay there for a time. His people were wasting away, their strength had almost gone, and he could not drive them forward. The seamen put up tents of spars and sails. These castaways who had been unable to rest in the boats found it a luxury merely to stretch themselves out on the sand. After the usual water ration had been given out they lay down and slept.

Yule could not sleep. He rose, looked round for traces of water or cultivation, and saw nothing but the dry sand and scrub of the Namaqualand coast. He scanned the veld to the horizon, but there was no

house or hut. Not even the tracks of a living creature could be seen in that wilderness.

Wallace the mate was awake, too, and Yule discussed the problem with him. Could they launch their boats again and make the Cape? Both officers agreed that it would be impossible. There was nothing for it but to march southwards under the burning sun until they came to civilisation. Yule decided to allow his weak flock to rest all the next day, and to set out before dawn on the following day.

That afternoon the body of John Chisholm was covered with the Union Jack. A grave was dug and Yule read the burial service. Next morning George Peat died, and there was another ceremony. "They lie side by side on that desert shore," Yule wrote. Everyone must have wondered

whether there would be a third burial – or more.

They all went out in different directions searching for water that day. A succulent plant was found, but the sap proved to be undrinkable. Some collected shellfish, but these were of doubtful value owing to the salty flavour. It was hot in the tents, and Captain Yule noticed that it was much cooler on a rise above the beach. The people had so little energy left that Yule had to bribe them with wine before they would move the tents.

Prospects for a successful march seemed poor. Nevertheless, the women devised canvas bags to hold the provisions. All the water was poured into bottles and jars, and distributed among the men who were regarded as reliable. Yule thought the

water would last for six more days, provided he did not increase the ration.

“We are like the last remnant of a famished garrison,” Yule’s diary reads at this stage. “The scene is appalling, for thirst is maddening. Everyone is suffering from swollen limbs and walking with difficulty.”

On the march next day Yule had to rest his company when they had covered only one mile. The loose sand was a torment, and sometimes the thorn bushes delayed them. Always there were the appeals for water to be resisted. It was so hot that the men stripped off their shirts. Somehow they covered another mile, and then everyone rested again.

“I had to persuade them to go on, for there was no shelter from the sun, and

our chances were growing darker every moment,” Yule recorded.

At noon they were following a coastal cliff when they noticed two huts on the beach below them. I know that spot. There is an island called Elephant Rock separated from the beach by a narrow channel. It is an island where the seals breed, raided by the Hottentots of old and by white people since the beginning of last century. Unfortunately there were no white people in the huts on that day when the survivors of the Australia passed by.

Yule and his men shouted, but there was no answer. They considered climbing down the cliff to see whether there was water in the huts, but no one felt strong enough to make the effort. (Later they learnt that there was water on the spot, but the barrels were buried and they would not have found them.)

Soon after the huts had been sighted the weary cavalcade reached a path leading into the interior. Some of Yule's party wanted to follow it. Yule decided to stick to the coast. "The coast was cooler, and most likely to lead us to safety," Yule wrote. "If we lost our way in the wilderness at night we would have died."

They covered six miles that day, and camped on a promontory exposed to the sea breeze. No sooner had they halted than Yule made a shocking discovery. A male passenger, an old man who often fell behind, had thrown away his coat in his anxiety to keep up with the others. He must have been delirious, for there were two full bottles of water in the pockets. Volunteers went back to look for this lost treasure, but they never found it.

Yule, that conscientious and thoughtful leader, had a still heavier blow in store for him that evening. He went round collecting the life-giving water bottles from his trusted carriers. Dr. Alexander Byers should have handed him two bottles, but he had only one. He had yielded to temptation and drunk a full bottle of water.

"I kept this crime from the other members of the party, as I feared they might kill the doctor," wrote Yule.

So the forlorn company prayed together as usual, and slept. They were within a few miles of help, but with so little water, and in their depressed state, they might have perished within sight of the river. Dew fell during the night; and a little rain, but they had no means of catching it. Some tried sucking the wet blankets, only to find

that they were saturated with salt from the boat journey.

“I could not fail to notice the distressing condition of the people in the morning,” Yule went on in his diary. “Faces were bloated and disfigured, lips were rent and chapped, arms and legs were swelling. I did not think that some of them would hold out until the next night. However, I pretended to be cheerful, though I did not feel it. I pointed to some mountains away in the southeast, and told them there was always water in the mountains.”

Captain Yule was right about the utter exhaustion of his party. They struggled along for three-quarters of a mile next morning and then collapsed. Yule issued a ration of water. They sang a hymn. Then the purgatory of walking began again. Another mile

and another rest. The old man who had lost his coat was almost finished. His face and limbs were covered with sores.

Yet the time passed, and rising ground appeared ahead. The mate thought he could see the river entrance. Yule ran forward. “There were the broad waters of the Olifant’s River, and the fertile river banks,” he wrote joyously. “I could see a whitewashed dwelling house and other buildings on the far bank, and clear blue smoke from the chimney. We prayed, and I served out water. As we were still a mile from the river I kept a small portion of water.”

They had carried their flag with them on the march, and now they waved it. The farm people saw them and sent a boat across. Yule gave out the last of the water. As the boat approached the

survivors sang the Twenty-third Psalm.

Someone hailed them in English. "Water!" gasped the survivors. "Can you take us to water?" The Englishman (who turned out to be a sailor working for the Elephant Rock sealing company) told them there was an excellent spring on the other side of the river. Yule and the women went first. In three trips they were all across and slaking the thirst that had been torturing them, night and day, for weeks. Those last eleven miles on foot along the coast had brought them closer to death than the voyage of six hundred miles or more in open boats.

The farmers near the river mouth were Willem Louw and the same Hendrik van Sly and son mentioned by the traveller Sir James Alexander in his account of his journey to the Orange

River a few years earlier. Francis Truer was also there, visiting the river with his mother-in-law on a fishing expedition. All these people treated the sick and tattered castaways with the utmost kindness.

"A whole sheep was cooked, and we were also offered part of a wild buck shot that morning," Yule wrote. "But our hearts were too full for keen appetite and the people wept with relief and gratitude."

Louw's farm was on the south bank four miles from the sea. He could not provide food and shelter for twenty-six people. Some needed careful nursing. However, Truter's mother-in-law, Mrs. Wolfaardt, offered to look after the three children, giving them clothes and treating them like a mother. The three women were sent by ox-wagon to Mr. Richard Fryer, storekeeper at

Donkin Bay, a journey of about four miles to the south of the river. Fryer sent the wagon back loaded with provisions, luxuries and medicines, and instructed his shepherd to kill as many sheep as the people might need. Fryer, who was a field cornet, also notified the civil commissioner at Clanwilliam (Mr. J. van Ryneveld, already mentioned) and asked him to make arrangements for transporting the party to Cape Town. That was a long trek, not without difficulties, over a century ago.

Days passed, however, before the emaciated people of the Australia were ready to move. "Symptoms of hardship and exposure appeared, loathsome blotches and swellings of arms and legs," recorded Yule. "Strange to relate, the women and children stood up to the hardship

better than the men, setting a fine example of patience and endurance. Mr. Thomas Harris of London, a cabin passenger, was in a most pitiable condition. He could not leave his bed. One leg burst. His hand had to be lanced with a razor. We were afraid he would die, and when the time came to depart for Cape Town we had to leave him behind in charge of the doctor."

Most of the company began to recover after five days. Then came an incessant craving for food. "It was impossible to satisfy our appetites, and we were in danger of creating a famine in the generous Dutch households," declared Yule. "Sheep were killed daily. We also enjoyed the wheat pounded in mortars and boiled, or ground in a mill for bread."

They left the Olifant's River in ox-wagons on January 19, with Truter as

conductor on the first stage. "The yoking of fourteen or sixteen oxen was like getting an East Indiaman under way" Yule reported. "The chattering of the Hottentots was very amusing. But the scene on parting from our dear friends was most affecting. The Dutch families were weeping aloud. Mrs. Wolfaardt could hardly bear to be separated from her orphan family. Even the Hottentots were crying. Our friends followed the wagons for some way and then stood waving. Thus we left the kind strangers who had entwined themselves round our hearts. While memory holds I trust that we shall never cease to pray for the richest blessings on the heads of our benevolent friends of the Olifant's River."

Yule reported that the ox-wagons often lost the way during the journey to Cape Town. Water was scarce in

that wilderness of bush and sand. Sometimes the wagons were almost capsized. Yule wrote: "We nearly suffered a second shipwreck in the desert, to the great alarm of the ladies."

They passed the Piketberg mountain. Everywhere the farmers were most hospitable. "Our dress, speech and psalms astonished them," Yule mentioned. "Then, on January 28, we reached Cape Town at midnight and experienced the luxury of a good bed for the first time."

Captain Yule interviewed Colonel Bell, deputy governor, and pointed out that his ship's company were penniless. A short account of their plight appeared in the *South African Commercial Advertiser*, however, and money flowed in. Bell was able to

distribute £120 in cash and clothing among passengers and crew.

Two of the steerage passengers decided to remain at the Cape. The other passengers were shipped on to Australia, while Captain Yule and the seamen returned to Scotland. Mr. van Ryneveld rendered an account to the government (which I found in the archives) for £24 to cover the cost of the three ox-wagons which he had requisitioned. Thus ended a forgotten drama of Cape seas and the grim coast of Namaqualand.

I put down the logbook of Captain Adam Yule with regret. This heroic Scottish seaman had gripped me not only by reason of his modesty but with many a telling phrase. He was incredibly stupid in keeping live bulls in his lifeboat, but he atoned nobly for his mistake during the long days and

nights of ordeal on sea and land. And not many thirsty and worried leaders would have forgiven the doctor for stealing that bottle of water.

St. Helena has often proved to be the South Atlantic island of refuge for ships in distress. Some left their bones there, like the s.s. *Papanui*, a skeleton which still juts above the Jamestown anchorage. She came in on fire half a century ago, and the islanders have never forgotten that fire.

If you land at Jamestown you will find a memorial tablet let into the wall of the public library next to the gardens. It reads: S.s. *Papanui*, destroyed by fire September 12, 1911. This tablet is erected by the 364 passengers in appreciation of the kindness and hospitality shown to them by the

inhabitants of this island September 11 – October 14, 1911.

This was a more sensational episode in the life of the island than the tablet suggests. It was followed by a coincidence which can have few parallels; for the *Paparoa*, sister ship to the *Papanui*, was destroyed by fire off St. Helena fifteen years later.

Papanui and *Paparoa* were six thousand five hundred ton ships owned by the New Zealand Shipping Company and carrying three classes of passengers from London to New Zealand. On her last voyage, *Papanui* was commanded by Captain T. Moore. She had a crew of one hundred and eight.

Captain Moore first heard of the fire on September 5, and he fought it so vigorously for five days that it seemed

to have gone out. Unfortunately it broke out again in a hold filled with bunker coal, but the captain decided that he could make Table Bay safely. People on the heights of St. Helena noticed the *Papanui* passing the island with smoke pouring out of her. For two days the *Papanui* steered for Cape Town; then the captain realised that the fire had beaten him and hurried back to St. Helena. The doomed liner came up to the anchorage shortly before midnight with her sides red hot, sounding distress calls with her siren.

The cable ship *Britannia* was stationed at St. Helena in those days, and she sent her boats across immediately. Seventy mothers and babies were taken to the cable ship, where they spent the night. By five next morning all the passengers had been landed. The men were housed in Ladder Hill

barracks, while the women went to the military hospital and Jamestown barracks. Naturally, this unexpected invasion by hundreds of helpless men, women and children was a great strain on the resources of an impoverished island. Yet the poor islanders never failed the people of the *Papanui*.

After the passengers had left, Captain Moore ran the *Papanui* into the shallow water where she now lies. Soon afterwards the fire spread right through the ship, and all hands abandoned her. "She was like a red flame at night," Mr. E. J. Warren, the St. Helena chemist, told me. "You could see the coal burning inside her. She was transparent."

The local newspaper pointed out that everyone would probably have perished in mid-ocean if the ship had run on for the Cape instead of turning

back to St. Helena. "Seldom in the world's history, we suppose, has there been such an opportunity of viewing such a terrific fire from all sides and from the over towering hills, right into the furnace itself," wrote the editor. The newspaper also recalled the fire in the whaler Polar Star in the middle of last century, when survivors landed so scantily dressed that they had to be provided with clothes on the wharf.

Passengers in the *Papanui* had their clothes, but showed little presence of mind in saving other belongings. One woman walked into the island hospital gripping a three penny pot of ink. Many were penniless. Dr. W. J. Arnold, a very fine character who was acting governor at the time, formed a committee of women and arranged for a number of the passengers to be billeted in country homes. It was hard

to find beds and bedding for so many people, but the islanders gave up their own blankets in this emergency. The government paid three shillings a day for the board of each person from the *Papanui*. A little frozen meat was saved from the ship, but this soon went bad. Church offertories were given to destitute passengers; a concert was held to raise money; and a special fund was started and five pounds sent to the mother of a seaman who died on the island. Certainly the poverty-stricken St. Helenans revealed their sympathy beyond doubt.

Mr. Warren told me that his little daughter kept pointing to the barefooted children from the ship and wanted to give away all her own clothes and shoes.

Meanwhile the burning *Papanui* remained as an object of wonder in the

anchorage. At first the heat was so fierce that people on the wharf could feel it. By September 18 the fire had almost gone out and some islanders ventured on board in search of souvenirs. A good many spoons and other items of cutlery bearing the crest of the New Zealand Shipping Company are still in use on St. Helena.

Mr. Warren made an offer of one guinea for the wreck, and this was forwarded to the underwriters. The *Papanui*, with her cargo, had been insured for £120,000 on that last voyage. Mr. Warren went on board to see what he could find, and salvaged a teacup and saucer blackened by fire, a magnificent silver-plated teapot bearing the company's house-flag, some entree dishes and the ship's bell. His one guinea offer was refused.

After some weeks above the surface the superstructure of the *Papanui* collapsed, leaving only a small jagged metal reminder of her presence. Coal from the wreck washed up on the beach for a long time, however, and this was greatly appreciated by the islanders. "It burnt more slowly than other coal, with a green flame, and smelt different," Mr. Warren recalled.

When the owners of the *Papanui* heard of the disaster they arranged for another of their steamers, the *Opawa*, to go to the aid of the stranded passengers. The *Opawa* had insufficient berths for so many people, but carpenters were put on board with the necessary timber, and they built the bunks on the way to St. Helena.

Scenes in the streets of Jamestown when the *Opawa* arrived were reminiscent of the departure of Boer

prisoners-of-war nine years previously. The *Papanui* people had made friends on the island during their stay of more than five weeks, and now there were many sad partings.

"We shall feel their departure," noted the local newspaper "It is extraordinary, however, how soon we settle down into our normal drowsy state. Within a few weeks of their departure we shall scarce realise that the arrival of the *Papanui*, the exciting scenes of the devastating fire and the housing and feeding of her people are a fact or anything but a dream of the past-saving for her presence on the beach as a landmark and constant reminder."

It was in March 1926 that the sister ship of the *Papanui* caught fire in mid-ocean after she had passed St. Helena on the run to Table Bay. There was no turning back for the *Paparoa*, as she

had left the island five hundred miles astern; but she had wireless and her distress call was picked up by a number of ships.

The British liner *Barrabool* was nearer than any of the others, and she saved the passengers and crew, and five Liverpool stowaways. She reached the *Paparoa* at night. Most of the ship's company were in the boats, but the master, chief engineer and wireless operator were still on board. As the *Barrabool* came up, the *Paparoa* was alight from bow to stern. Flames roared up from the decks. The last three officers had to jump for their lives. When the cruiser, H.M.S. *Birmingham*, passed the spot not long afterwards there was only wreckage to show where the *Paparoa* had gone down.

Shipmasters will tell you that they dread fire at sea more than any other peril afloat. Remind them of icebergs and they may change their minds and place the ice first. Not every ship has radar.

It may sound queer to talk of icebergs off the South African coast. Nevertheless, icebergs have been sighted from Cape Point and Cape Agulhas in the past, and this sort of history always repeats itself. Icebergs are carried by a strong current from the Antarctic into the Southern Ocean and South Atlantic; and some of these drift close to the South African coast.

If you were in Durban in 1922 you may remember the fine old barque *Garthforce* which was towed in there after a collision with an iceberg. She was one of the last British full-rigged ships, owned by Sir William Garth-

waite. The *Garthforce* sailed from England in 1921 with Captain R. D. Cruickshank in command. His wife travelled with him. Late in January 1922 the *Garthforce* was “running her easting down” for Australia. Cruickshank was driving her hard in squally, misty weather. In the small hours of the morning she crashed full into an invisible, waiting berg.

When all hands had tumbled out of their bunks the ship had recoiled, but the startled men could see the green gleam of the starboard light flashing against the wall of ice. Her jib-boom was twisted askew, her bows crumpled, and she was making water in the forepeak.

Cruickshank fixed his position as eighty miles to the east of Prince Edward and Marion Islands. (They were uninhabited in those days, but

have since become South African territory with a permanent weather station.) At first he thought of making for the islands and beaching his ship. Dawn revealed that the foremast had been carried away above the foretops’l yard. The foredeck was a tangled mass of rigging, torn canvas and broken spars. And the wind had reached gale force.

On the other hand, the pumps were keeping the water under control. Cruickshank had no wireless. He knew that he might spend months on Prince Edward or Marion Island before a ship came in sight. So he decided to make for the shipping lane and seek help.

Day after day for a fortnight the tired men of the *Garthforce* sweated at the hand-pumps while the stricken barque sailed slowly northwards. Their boats had been smashed by falling ice. One

night another iceberg appeared right across her course, and all hands knew that there would be no escape if she struck again. However, they avoided this iceberg and drifted rather than sailed to the steamer track.

There, on February 12, she was sighted by the Swedish cargo steamer *Unden*. The *Garthforce* was flying distress signals, and now she hoisted the code flags "M.Y." meaning "I am unable to manoeuvre". But the forward bulkhead still held and there seemed to be a chance of reaching port.

"Will you tow me?" Cruickshank signalled. Captain Hjerstedt of the *Unden* agreed. It was essential that he should steam perilously close to the *Garthforce* while passing the hand line to which the wire towing cable was attached. He took the risk. It was

nearly a thousand miles to Durban, but the long tow began.

The cable snapped on the first day, and it was dark before the new wire cable was secured by the crew of the *Garthforce*. Next day the strain was so heavy that the captain of the *Unden* devised a strong manilla "spring" which lengthened the towing cable to eight hundred feet. This compensated for the jerks caused by the ships rolling and pitching in the heavy swell.

Towing went on for a week at about five or six knots. Always the possibility of the bulkhead collapsing was on Captain Cruickshank's mind; and it seemed that the men were always pumping.

Durban was in sight when a gale sprang up. The *Garthforce* could not face the weather with her bows

damaged. So the two ships drifted and laboured in the heavy seas.

At four o'clock on a Sunday afternoon the *Unden* worked her way cleverly into shallow water off Morewood Cove, providing a little shelter for the hard-pressed barque. When the gale died down the two ships made for the Bluff and anchored. Next day they entered port, though both captains admitted later that they never expected to reach Durban safely. Captain Hjerstedt was so sure that the *Garthforce* would founder that he had his lifeboats ready. But he wondered whether any boat would have lived in the seas that were running off the Natal coast that Sunday afternoon.

Captain Hjerstedt and his crew earned their salvage money. The damaged *Garthforce* was valueless in those last days of sail; but her cargo of rock salt

paid all expenses. She never went to sea again. For years she lay in Durban harbour, a melancholy sight with bowsprit and figurehead missing and plates buckled. In the end the ship that had been salvaged with such difficulty was taken out and scuttled. Captain Cruickshank sailed again as master of the auxiliary barquentine *Sound of Jura* on one of her Kerguelen sealing expeditions. Later he served as a berthing master at Table Bay Docks.

Most famous of all iceberg adventures in South African waters was the escape of H.M.S. *Guardian* towards the end of the eighteenth century. Lieutenant Edward Riou, her captain, ranked with the notorious Bligh as one of the most expert seamen in the Royal Navy. The story has been told so often that I shall not repeat it in detail here. After striking the iceberg Riou

allowed half his officers and men to leave in the boats, for there seemed to be no hope of saving the waterlogged ship. Nevertheless, Riou brought his crippled, rudderless ship safely to Table Bay, whereas the boats were never seen again. Riou was killed in action at the Battle of Copenhagen, and Nelson wrote of him: "In poor dear Riou the country has sustained an irreparable loss."

Steamers have also collided with icebergs in the south. It was in July 1895 that the s.s. *Port Chalmers* left Table Bay for Australia with eight hundred cases of dynamite on board. She struck an iceberg lying right across her track, and about one hundred tons of ice fell on her deck. The forepeak filled with water, but the collision bulkhead held. Mauritius was fifteen hundred miles away, Adelaide

was nearly five thousand. The master chose Adelaide. He encountered gales which smashed two of his lifeboats, but reached port at last.

There is no ice patrol fleet, such as the seafaring nations of the world maintain in the North Atlantic, to give wireless warning of bergs in the Southern Ocean. Some old sailors claim to be able to "smell ice" in foggy weather; others rely on the cold feel of the air, the presence of birds, the temperature of the water, or the echo of the ship's siren flung back by a wall of ice in the neighbourhood. Radar is a blessing nowadays when there is ice about. Some of the old-fashioned methods have been proved to be unreliable. A sudden fall in sea temperature, taken by a thermometer, certainly suggests the presence of ice; but it has been demonstrated that there

may be no change in temperature at all with an iceberg right ahead. The air will not be cold unless the ship is to leeward of a large berg. Echoes are certainly obtained from smooth-faced bergs; but when the ice assumes other shapes there is often no echo at all.

In the Southern Ocean, then, without radar, much depends on the eyes of the officer of the watch and the lookout-man. Ships have been saved by a quick-witted officer ringing down "full astern" in time to prevent a collision. Sometimes it is possible to hear the dreaded surf beating against the base of an iceberg. Even on fine nights ice cannot be seen far away. A berg will loom out of the darkness suddenly, like that which destroyed the *Titanic*, sending the chill of fear through all who behold it. An unseen iceberg is infinitely more dangerous

than a derelict for it may rip a ship along the waterline.

A queer story was told by the master of the French sailing vessel *Emile Galline* after a voyage across the Southern Ocean in 1921. He was nearly crushed in a huge field of ice; but he almost forgot his anxiety when he saw, gripped in a crevice of an immense berg, a three-masted sailing ship. Her main topmast had gone, but otherwise she appeared to be undamaged. Not a soul was to be seen on her decks or on the iceberg. The lifeboats seemed to be in their places.

Was this some old, abandoned whaler or exploring vessel, or was the mysterious derelict a fresh wreck? That is another of those puzzles set by the sea, a riddle without an answer. There was, however, a parallel to this mystery in northern waters many years

ago. Men of the English brig *Renovation*, Limerick to Quebec, observed two ships on an ice floe off the Newfoundland Banks. There is a possibility that they were the *Erebus* and *Terror* of Sir John Franklin's tragic expedition.

Icebergs large enough to carry whole fleets of ships are seen in the Southern Ocean. Ice islands would be a better name for them; for they are sometimes sixty miles long, dark in colour, with masses of rock and earth clinging to them. Captain Cook called them "floating rocks", which indeed they resemble. Nothing of the same size is seen in the Arctic regions.

The explanation lies in the Antarctic continent itself, in that blizzard-swept sheet of ice which is always moving slowly northwards to the sea. Scientists estimate that the ice-cap advances

a mile in four years. Every year, in the great thaws of the southern summer, mighty coastal areas of the ice sheet break away from the land mass with a thunderous sound and start their long voyages, as ice islands, across the ocean.

Chapter Six

FOUND ABANDONED

IF the crew of the brig *Conservative* had been drowned in one of the obvious ways they would have been forgotten long ago. It is the mystery that has kept the tale alive for more than a century among the secluded fisher folk of the Saldanha lagoon. No doubt the looting also helped to make the discovery of the abandoned ship memorable.

Sometimes after a gale a fragment of timber, fastened with mushroom-headed iron spikes, comes up on Fourteen Mile Beach. Nelson's ships were fastened like that. And the people of the lagoon villages, wandering over to the coast in search of driftwood, pick up the old timber and remark: "There's another piece from the brig."

Fourteen Mile Beach starts at Yzerfontein, the resort which is only about forty miles from Cape Town by the coastal tracks. It is a straight and sandy beach, backed by high dunes. Walk northwards from Yzerfontein and you will probably be alone until you come to the rocks opposite Vondeling Island. On this lonely beach the *Conservative* ran aground in March 1843, leaving no one to explain the tragedy.

The old sea-whitened timber first put me on the track of the *Conservative*. Reports and letters I studied in the Cape archives made me restless until I had heard the story from the lagoon people and assembled all the evidence I could find. Even now I am not satisfied. "There is something very strange about this wreck," said the

writer of one old letter I found, and the strangeness remains to this day.

The brig *Conservative*, bound from Liverpool to Table Bay, was a fine craft of two hundred and fifty tons. Captain William Lind was master and he had a crew of nine. Besides her cargo of clothing, soap and cutlery, the brig carried two boxes of government mail.

Apparently the *Conservative* closed in with the shore on the night of March 14 in thick fog. The following evening a man named February was herding cattle with his son when they saw the brig well up on the beach with all sails set. A message was sent to Mr. G. Marsh, the Resident, who ruled the Saldanha area for many years from the lovely homestead near the spring at Oostenwal.

Marsh had a government boat with crew always ready to take him about the bay. They crossed the lagoon, trudged across the sandy peninsula from Stofbergfontein, and arrived on Fourteen Mile Beach during the afternoon of March 16. There they found a gathering of wagons and people such as the lonely beach had never seen at that spot before. The beach was strewn with hats. Some people were breaking open boxes and carrying away soap, shoes and stockings. Others were risking their lives in the surf and broaching the cargo on board the wreck.

Marsh sent Wybrand Thuynsma, the Field Cornet, on board the brig to stop the looting. One tall fellow said he was damned if he would leave, so Thuynsma threw him overboard. John Armstrong, head boatman at the

Residency, was also sent on board by Marsh to see whether he could recover anything of value. Armstrong found the ship's papers, manifest and two boxes of mail, and recovered a sextant from someone who had taken it. Another of Marsh's men saved the captain's gun and pistols and two quadrants.

It was suspected that the looters had already found the ship's money, and there was talk of gold rings which someone had stolen. All on board swigged the bottles of cherry brandy found in the cabin aft.

Marsh was not only concerned with protecting the cargo. He could find no sign of the crew, and before long he realized that there was a mystery to be solved. Search parties were sent out in every direction, but not a sign of the ship's company was to be found. They

would have called it a *Mary Celeste* mystery but for the fact that many years were to pass before the *Mary Celeste* was abandoned at sea.

The wreck was first reported in the *South African Commercial Advertiser* on March 22. By that time the ship's boats had been located up the beach to the north. But the newspaper added: "Nothing has been discovered on which to found a conjecture respecting the fate of the master and crew. Before going to press we hope to be able to lay before the reader some account of this affair, which at present is involved in utter darkness."

In a later issue the newspaper published a letter from a Saldanha resident to a friend in Cape Town, as follows: "My own opinion is that the persons on board were all taken by surprise when the vessel struck, and

that they betook themselves to their boats, which must have upset in the surf, and that the bodies were carried out to sea by the drawback, which is strong and travels north. Nothing was washed up to the south of the wreck. The boats were washed up at a distance of eight hundred yards. They were sound and had been used, as the pins are on them and the oars washed up very near them.”

Reports which I read in the archives only serve to deepen the mystery. For example, a Mr. John Sinclair was sent to the wreck to take charge of salvaging the cargo. In a letter to his brother he wrote the sentence which caught my attention: “There is something very strange about this wreck. The launch and cutter which are on shore had not a drop of water in them. The launch had no painter in her. The

cutter had part of a brand new one which had been cut before coming on shore. The man who first went on board says that in the cabin he saw hardly anything but a piece of cold meat in the pantry and some of the men’s hammocks hanging forward. Also a woman’s petticoat.”

The painter is, of course, the rope made fast to the bows of a boat so that it can be handled easily alongside. I do not think the cutting of the painter had any significance; but it must have been very baffling to find two boats on the beach right side up without water in them. Boats which had capsized in the surf and drowned their crews might have been expected to contain water. And the fact that the oars were close by suggests that the crew reached the beach safely and threw down their oars on the sand. If the boats had

capsized, the light oars would usually drift away and might be found elsewhere.

At the end of March a Mr. van Breda of Geelbek farm reported that four bodies had been washed up at Kreefte Baai, opposite Vondeling Island, and a few miles north of the wreck. Mr. Pillans, agent for the *Conservative*, went to the spot at once with Customs officers and others. An inquest was held on the spot. The bodies were dressed in clothes such as seamen wore, canvas trousers and so on, but they could not be identified. Dr. Daly of Malmesbury examined the bodies. Graves were dug above high-water mark, and Pillans conducted a burial service.

Two more bodies drifted ashore in the middle of April. One was a stout, elderly man with black silk necker-

chief and a watch in a pocket; possibly the captain.

Gape Town talked about the loss of the *Conservative* for days. First news was brought by the master of a small grain-carrying sloop, who saw the brig on the beach. Then the *Cape of Good Hope Government Gazette* announced that the ship and cargo would be sold on the beach. The cargo was described as "an extensive assortment of cottons, woollens, cutlery, oilman's stores, hats, soap, earthenware and haberdashery, all selected for this market."

Then the paddle-wheel steamer *Phoenix* was chartered. A woodcut showing this early Cape coasting steamer of four hundred tons appeared in the newspaper. It was stated that she would leave Table Bay on Thursday, March 30 for Saldanha and return on the Saturday. Tickets, including

refreshments, cost three guineas. Forty passengers booked. At the auction sale the *Conservative* fetched one thousand pounds (far more than she was worth) and the cargo another thousand.

It is easy to account for the loss of the *Conservative*, making her landfall in dense fog. There will always be impatient masters who cannot wait for a fog to lift. But the drowning of all hands when there was nothing to prevent the boats landing safely on Fourteen Mile Beach – there is the mystery, made even more puzzling by the dry boats with the oars beside them.

So that when I walk on Fourteen Mile Beach and gaze at the timber from the lost brig I am aware of a great mystery of Cape seas. Those seamen in the graves at Kreefte Baai knew what happened when the brig *Conservative*

was abandoned, but no one else will ever know.

Almost the whole population of Port Elizabeth gathered on the hillside one September day in 1864 when the British full-rigged ship *Scindia* was escorted into the bay by a flotilla of tugs and two other sailing ships. For the *Scindia* appeared to be a *Mary Celeste* in South African waters. It was a long time before the mystery was solved.

First to sight the *Scindia* was the Cape Receife lighthouse keeper. He noted the distress signal (red ensign reversed) and the damaged rigging, and sent a messenger on horseback to town with the news. Three harbour tugs hurried out, the *Little Meek*, *Little Bess* and *Sailor's Friend*. When the tugs reached the *Scindia* they found

that the masters of two sailing vessels had scented salvage money and were standing by. These were the brig *Alecia Anne* under Captain Kirby and Captain Maxted's full-rigged ship *Aminta*.

Kirby was short-handed, but he had come to an agreement with Maxted and the two masters had put a salvage crew on board. This did not suit the tug masters, who felt they had been cheated. Fighting broke out when they tried to board the *Scindia*, and a tug seaman named Phillip fell into the sea and was drowned.

However, all six ships moved into Algoa Bay next day and the whole town began discussing the mystery. Captain Kirby reported that he had made a signal to the *Scindia* while she was sailing along the coast off Cape Recife with all canvas drawing.

There was no reply. Then he observed that there was no one at the wheel. She was yawing, as might be expected. Two lifeboats were in the chocks. Not a soul appeared on deck.

Kirby then boarded her and found that she had been abandoned. Her holds were filled with Eastern goods-tea, jute and silks, and the coarse brown sugar of the East Indies called jaggery. Kirby also noticed that water had entered the holds, but he did not regard her as unseaworthy.

Everywhere on board there were signs of hasty departure. The water in the holds and the damage to her rigging did not seem to Kirby a full explanation of the sudden flight from this fine iron ship of nine hundred tons with her valuable cargo. People in Port Elizabeth put forward various theories. Mutiny was suggested; though others

said that the crew had been driven over the side by a lunatic.

Captain Maxted of the *Aminta* reported that the *Scindia* had been loading close to his ship at Garden Reach, Calcutta, and had sailed a few days before him. Her master was Captain J. Carr. The ship was valued at ten thousand pounds and the cargo at forty thousand. So there was a small fortune to be shared by those who had brought the *Scindia* into Algoa Bay.

For months the mystery of the *Scindia* remained unsolved, and it seemed that the sea had swallowed Captain Carr and all his men. Then came the news that Carr and his whole ship's company had been landed at St. Helena by the ship *Silver Eagle*.

Carr stated that after his ship had been damaged in a southeast gale he had

decided that she was about to founder. The *Silver Eagle* had come along at that moment and responded to the distress signal. It must have been a bad moment for Carr when he learnt that the ship which he believed to be on the bottom of the ocean had been at anchor in Algoa Bay for months.

Seven years after this episode the mail steamer *Natal* towed into Algoa Bay the three-masted schooner *Thomas Nickerson* which she had found at anchor and abandoned off the Gouritz River mouth. Cutlasses and arms were strewn about the deck. The captain's cabin was in disorder and cigars lay about the floor. All the ship's papers were missing, but it was clear that she was a German vessel bound from Kronstadt in Russia to Yokohama, with a full general cargo.

It looked like mutiny. Days later, however, the mate and a few seamen arrived in Port Elizabeth and told their story. The ship had been strained in a gale and had leaked so badly that they had run for the coast, anchored and abandoned her. The captain, second mate and two seamen had been drowned when their boat overturned in the surf. The other boat was upset but the men reached the shore safely.`

That was their story. Port officials and others in Port Elizabeth suspected that the full tale of the *Thomas Nickerson* remained to be told. Those cutlasses, for example. However, the captain was dead and the truth about that abandoned ship never came out.

A third queer arrival at Algoa Bay was the so-called “phantom ship” early this century. Sail had not yet vanished

from the oceans. Rival tugs cruised about the Algoa Bay entrance looking for sailing vessels and offering to tow them up to the anchorage. The brothers William and Sadie Messina were eager for work, and they had the tugs *Itala*, *Ulundi* and *Talana*. A most formidable adversary was Captain Alfred Charles Harding, whose tug *Sir Frederick* was owned by the Port Elizabeth Boating Company. These old competitors were both on the spot during the “phantom ship” incident.

Captain Harding saved many lives, and prevented a number of shipwrecks during windjammer days. He took great risks in the 1902 gale, when eighteen ships were driven ashore in Algoa Bay. He saved cargoes worth thousands of pounds. But this wonderful old seaman, (founder of the famous Harding dynasty of South African tug

masters and pilots) always declared that the “phantom ship” was his narrowest escape.

He was out before dawn one day near Thunderbolt Reef, which is just off Cape Receife, and it was blowing hard from the west. The *Sir Frederick* was plunging her nose into the long seas, and all hands were hoping for a ship so that they could return to Algoa Bay. Then the red and green navigation lights of a ship came out of the darkness.

Harding hailed her again and again. No answering voice was heard, and so he pulled across to her in a dinghy with two of his crew. Her decks were empty. They shouted down the fo’c’stle hatch and searched the cabins aft. Then they discovered that the ship was full of water and had been abandoned.

She was the Russian barque *Lebu*, loaded with timber. Very often a timber ship will float after she has been badly holed. Harding called to his mate in the tug to send a line on board. He took the wheel himself, hoping to reach the anchorage.

At that moment a hail came from the darkness and a ship’s lifeboat came in sight. The master and crew of the *Lebu* had seen the lights of the tug and returned. One of the Russians spoke English, and he shouted to Harding : “Look out – we hit a rock and she’s going to sink. She’ll sink at any moment.”

“I’m in charge now,” replied Harding firmly. “Go aboard my tug and I’ll tow her in.”

Unfortunately the tug went ahead too fast and the tow-rope parted. The jerk

seemed to open up the hole in the *Lebu* still further, for now it was clear that she was foundering. The bows lifted. Harding and his men were almost at water-level on the poop. They ran forward, but still the *Lebu* tilted and slid below the surface.

As the three men leapt on to the fo'c'stle head they saw the Messina tug *Talana* only a few yards away. "Heave a line," called Harding desperately. They hauled all three men to safety, out of the vortex as the *Lebu* sank. It was over in a matter of seconds.

After the ship had gone the astonished tug crews stood watching as huge pieces of timber shot up from the sunken vessel's holds. The *Lebu* had settled on the bottom in sixty fathoms, and huge barks of wood catapulted

with such force that they shot clear of the water.

Harding and his rivals earned a little money that day, picking up timber. Harding went on for many years, a man of many sea adventures; searching for the *Waratah*; taking part in the invasion of German South West Africa. It was a sad day for Captain Harding when the old *Sir Frederick* was scrapped and scuttled on Thunderbolt Reef, a sight he could not bring himself to watch. But the moment he always recalled with a shudder was that dawn off Thunderbolt Reef when the *Lebu* went down like a stone and almost took him with her.



It was a sad day for Captain Harding when the old Sir Frederick was scrapped and scuttled on Thunderbolt Reef.

Chapter Seven

STOLEN SHIPS

SELDOM in the recent annals of the sea do you encounter a stolen ship, for this is a crime which went out of fashion with the pirates. Table Bay, however, has known two stolen ships. I am referring now to ocean-going ships, not small craft such as the yacht which a friend of mine lost, then located by air and soon recovered.

One of the smartest Cape schooners of a century ago was the *Prince Edward* of fifty-six tons. She carried a bust of Prince Edward wearing a Scotch cap as figurehead, she had decks and topsides of teak, a square stern, and she was coppered against marine growths. Often she carried passengers and stores to Hondeklip Bay, which was then the port for the Namaqualand copper mines. She also supplied the

guano islands with store's and water and brought back guano.

She was owned by two Cape Town business men named Maple and Daneel. Maple was known as Captain Maple, as he always sailed in the *Prince Edward* and ranked legally as master. He had no seafaring qualifications, but none were required in those days. The real master was William Hamilton, aged thirty-seven. He gave all the orders, but appeared on the ship's articles as mate.`

The *Prince Edward* was at anchor in Table Bay on the afternoon of January 19, 1859, ready for a passage to Hondeklip. She had two white miners on board. The only other passenger was a girl named Margaret Lucas, who had come from St. Helena in the hope of finding work as a cook on the mines. The schooner was provisioned

for three months, as she had been chartered to visit the islands off the coast of South West Africa after calling at Hondeklip.

“Captain” George Maple hired a boat at four that afternoon to take him out to the *Prince Edward*. He had cleared the ship, and had the papers with him. A mining official accompanied him with the intention of handing over a bag containing three hundred and fifty sovereigns, pay for the miners on the Phillips and King property. There was also a passenger named Green.

As they left the wharf Maple noticed that the anchor was coming up. Then he saw the *Prince Edward* making sail, and said to his companions: “That’s a smart mate I’ve got.” But he was not so pleased when he saw the schooner sailing out of Table Bay without him. He waved angrily, and

by this time the boat was so close that Hamilton must have recognised him. The smart mate looked the other way and kept on his course.

Once it became clear that the schooner did not intend to wait for him, Maple took action. A whale boat was in the bay, and Maple offered the oarsmen fifty pounds to row after the schooner and bring her back. The skipper refused. He thought the mate of the *Prince Edward* was having a joke at Maple’s expense. Moreover, the whaling skipper pointed out that the south-easter was coming up and that he might not be able to get back safely.

Maple hurried back to the jetty and ran to the port captain’s office. They signalled to the station on Signal Hill, and the lookout man reported that the *Prince Edward* was lying becalmed to

the north of Robben Island. Three steamers were lying in Table Bay at the time. Maple approached each agent in turn, for he was desperately anxious to reach his ship.

He had no luck. The mail steamer *Athens* refused to be delayed on such a mission. The *Dane* had her propeller unshipped for examination; and the *Zulu* was having her boilers repaired. Maple, a most determined man, hastened to Simonstown to ask Admiral Grey to send a man-o'-war in pursuit of the schooner.

Two days later the *Cape Argus* came out with a leisurely report of the affair. "It may truly be said that though Cape Town is usually one of the quietest of quiet places, the out-of-the-way events that do occur now and again are as startling as any of the extraordinary occurrences that characterise the

history of the cities of Europe," the report opened. "A daring act of piracy perpetrated by the mate and crew of the schooner *Prince Edward* has created excitement that will not soon subside. Guess the astonishment of all classes of the community on learning that in broad daylight, and in the presence of the captain, the mate and crew feloniously set sail and departed on, probably, a buccaneering expedition."

The *Government Gazette* dealt with the matter in a notice headed: "Piracy or Barratry of a Mate and Mariners." A warning was issued that the *Prince Edward* had sailed without papers, and that if any papers were produced they would be false. Government officials everywhere were called upon to seize the ship the moment she appeared in any port. A later notice added that Mr.

J. M. Hill, resident magistrate of Cape Town, had issued a warrant for the arrest of Hamilton and the six men of the schooner's crew.

Meanwhile the admiral had sent Commander Oldfield of H.M.S. *Lyra* in search of the missing schooner. The man-o'-war was a steam sloop which had been operating against slavers in East African waters. The sloop cruised to the westward without finding the *Prince Edward* and then returned for further instructions. Someone suggested that the schooner might have gone to Hondeklip Bay. The *Lyra* steamed away northwards and Cape Town eagerly awaited the solution of the mystery.

Newspapers published a rumour that Hamilton had taken the *Prince Edward* to South America, as he knew the ports on the other side of the South

Atlantic. It was also said that several naval deserters and "other females" (apart from Margaret Lucas) had been seen on board just before the schooner left. The whole affair was so queer that wild rumours were bound to arise. To this day, no one has ever discovered William Hamilton's real motive. He may have intended to steal the ship and leave the waters of Africa, but there were no accomplices, no naval seamen or women in the plot.

Those who thought the schooner would turn up at Hondeklip Bay were right. Hamilton got rid of his passengers and he was unloading his cargo when H.M.S. *Lyra* arrived. Then he and his crew were taken to the local *tronk* while Commander Oldfield made inquiries.

During the passage to Hondeklip, it appeared, Hamilton had asked the girl

Margaret Lucas whether she would like to return to St. Helena, and gave her the impression that he might take the schooner there. Hamilton had told officials at Hondeklip that his ship's papers had been left behind by accident, and would be sent overland. He created deep suspicion (which seems to me to have been fully justified) by trying to secure a cargo of copper ore. He offered to take such a cargo to England.

Commander Oldfield took Hamilton and his crew on board H.M.S. *Lyra*, and towed the *Prince Edward* back to Table Bay. Her return, and the landing of the arrested men, brought most of Cape Town down to the waterfront. Hundreds walked from the wharf up Adderley Street as Hamilton and the six seamen were escorted to the old gaol (later the Customs House).

They were all brought up in court on the last day of January. Maple told the magistrate how he had seen the *Prince Edward* suddenly spread her canvas and depart. He could not explain the mystery. Hamilton, he said, had never been a drinker; he was a master of many years' standing, and knew very well that he had no right to leave without papers.

Hamilton first of all declared that he alone was to blame for everything that had happened. The crew obeyed him from habit, and knew nothing of what was going on. He protested against the charge of piracy. "I was tired of waiting for the captain," wound up Hamilton rather lamely.

The magistrate pointed out that any vessel found on the high seas without papers was liable to be seized as a pirate, and Hamilton must have known

that. Nothing could justify Hamilton and the men taking the ship away as they did.

The papers were sent to the Attorney-General for decision. Hamilton was allowed bail in the shape of two sureties for fifty pounds each and a personal bond for one hundred pounds. The men were then discharged with a caution to hold themselves in readiness to attend when called upon.

The magistrate added: "Commander Oldfield of H.M.S. *Lyra*, who was entitled to claim salvage for the recovery of this vessel, has liberally declined to accept the sum of one hundred and fifty pounds from Mr. Daneel, part owner of the vessel."

And that, strange to relate, was the end of the matter. All the records and

newspaper reports stop dead at that point. It is clear that the Attorney-General refused to prosecute, and that the piratical Hamilton went free. A secret of the sea died with Hamilton, and I am as much in the dark as were the people of Cape Town a century ago. We can be sure of only one thing. Hamilton may have been tired of waiting for Maple, but that was not the true reason for sailing out of Table Bay without permission or papers.

At the end of January 1881 a yacht-like steamer of about five hundred tons entered Table Bay Docks. The name *India* was painted on her handsome clipper bows. Her master, a mulatto named Watkins, reported that she had come from La Guaira in Venezuela with coffee.

She had a cargo of coffee all right, but nearly everything else about the *India* was false. However, her papers appeared to be in order and no one had any reason to be suspicious of her. The docks were busy. A German man-o'-war *Hertha* was alongside; the American ship *J. W. Marr* put in for medical aid, as the captain's wife had been taken ill; and the brig *Rio Loge* arrived with the news that one of her sailors had fallen from aloft and been drowned. No one looked twice at the *India* with her quiet black hull and black funnel.

Captain Watkins walked down the gang-plank one day in Cape Town and was seen no more. Evidently he did not feel comfortable on board the *India*. He said nothing to the authorities, but simply vanished and sailed away safely elsewhere as people were

able to do in those days before passports had been inflicted upon us.

Another incident during the fortnight that the *India* stayed in dock was the sale of the cargo of coffee. It fetched twelve thousand pounds, but only two thousand five hundred pounds were paid in cash.

A man who called himself Smith and who was described as owner of the *India*, tried to sell the ship in Cape Town. There were no offers, and by now some people were becoming suspicious.

The final incident was a fight on board the *India* in which a member of the crew produced a revolver. This was thrown overboard before any shots had been fired. The seaman who owned the revolver then left the ship and a Scot was signed on to take his place.

If the *India* had remained any longer her secret must have leaked out. However, she coaled hastily and departed in ballast on February 14, having given Mauritius as her next port of call.

That trim little steamer had been stolen. She was in the hands of a band of criminals. Smith's real name was Henderson, and he was the leader of the gang and the most dangerous man of the lot. Henderson was a Victorian playboy, brought up in a wealthy home. His father had owned a steam yacht. Then the Henderson fortune had melted, Henderson's father had committed suicide, the yacht had been sold.

Henderson missed the yacht more than anything else. He was determined to have a ship of his own; and with the aid of a wealthy friend named Carlton

Walker he chartered the Clyde passenger steamer *Ferret*, owned by the Highland Railway Company, for a six months' yachting cruise. Walker had opened a genuine banking account and paid in ten thousand pounds. Thus, when the conspirators bought provisions, stores and coal on credit, the bank assured all the ship chandlers that everything was in order. Henderson, it should be noted, had a wide knowledge of the shipping business and he was also one of the great forgers of his day.

He had selected the *Ferret* because she was outwardly an inconspicuous little ship with interior fittings in accordance with his luxurious tastes. The charter fee was £276 a month. She had a panelled saloon and plush cabins. Henderson filled her storerooms with

fine wines, rich foods, and tableware suitable for a palace.

Henderson brought his wife on board (if she was his wife) with a pile of baggage. Walker acted as purser. The only other man in the plot was Robert Wright, the mate. Captain Watkins, the mulatto, had been master of Henderson's father's yacht; but it was never clear why he had been engaged. Possibly he reminded Henderson of happy days in the past. He was certainly regarded as a man who would not give any trouble. Seamen were found easily enough at that period, and they were recruited on the same principle. As things turned out, Henderson and his accomplices showed a high degree of cunning in the matter of personnel, for no one ever gave them away while the game lasted.

The *Ferret* sailed from Southampton on November 1, 1880, steering for Gibraltar. She passed close to the signal station at Gibraltar, made her number, saw that it was acknowledged, and then steamed on into the Mediterranean.

Now the real jiggery-pokery began. That night the *Ferret* put into a quiet, uninhabited cove on the North African coast, and Henderson called all hands into the saloon. He had already used his fists and brought out a revolver to secure a moral ascendancy over the crew. According to evidence given later, he had set up a reign of terror before the ship was out of the Bay of Biscay. Now he pretended to explain the real purpose of the voyage. He was bound on a gun-running expedition to South America, he said, and all those who stood by him would be rewarded.

Did anyone wish to back out? He put his revolver on the table, and there were no objections.

All right then. Everyone had to help in the work of transforming the *Ferret*. Her yellow funnel was too prominent. So were her bright blue lifeboats. And the deckhouse just aft of the funnel would have to be moved to the stern. Then there was the name. Overnight the *Ferret* became the *Benton*. The name on the ship's bell was not forgotten. They worked with files and paint brushes, shortened the funnel, painted it black, and removed the bowsprit. All but two of the lifeboats were painted white.

They steamed out of the Mediterranean at night. When they were in the Strait of Gibraltar the two blue lifeboats and a number of deck fittings bearing the name *Ferret* were

dropped over the side. Lifebuoys went over, too, and certain papers and clothes.

It was meant to give the impression of a shipwreck and it succeeded. The *Ferret* was posted as missing at Lloyd's. The Highland Railway produced items of wreckage found on the coast of Morocco as proof of the loss, and the underwriters paid out in full. By that time the stolen ship was heading for Santos in Brazil. She had a printing press on board, and Henderson had mastered the art of faking any official documents which might be needed. So that when the *Benton* reached Santos, no awkward questions were asked.

Henderson quoted such reasonable freight rates at Santos that a coffee merchant was delighted to favour him with a cargo of four thousand bags

consigned to Marseilles. That coffee came in very useful; not only for raising money in Cape Town but for use as fuel on the way across the South Atlantic, when they ran short of coal.

Evidently the conspirators were afraid of a hue-and-cry when the *Benton* did not arrive at Marseilles with the coffee. So they worked another little change in mid-ocean. New ship's papers were manufactured. And the *Benton* became the *India*.

You know what happened on board the *India* during her visit to Cape Town. She cleared out just in time, not only because of local complications, but also because a number of Henderson's victims in England had discovered that they had been swindled. Walker had closed his banking account before departure and

withdrawn most of the ten thousand he had deposited. Suppliers of wines and cigars, napery and carpets, were whistling in vain for their money. The firm which had overhauled the engines discovered that Henderson's promissory notes were valueless.

One swindle suggests another. Lloyds sent a man to Morocco to investigate the "wreck" of the *Ferret*, and he returned strongly of the opinion that the ship had been stolen and not lost. So the harbour authorities all over the world were supplied with a description of the *Ferret* and asked to keep a sharp look-out for her.

When the *Ferret* arrived at Mauritius with the mate, Robert Wright, in command, she was still one jump ahead of the police. (No cables to remote places and no wireless in 1881, remember). Henderson tried to secure

a cargo of sugar at Port Louis, but his charm failed and the *Ferret* went on to Melbourne.

Melbourne saw the end of this fantastic adventure. Henderson kept steam up, ready to escape; and he offered the ship for sale at the low price of ten thousand pounds. By this time the description of the *Ferret* had been circulated. A shipping man who had read of the theft looked out of his window, saw the *India* at the wharf with steam up, searched Lloyd's Register and failed to find her. All those facts together rang a bell in his mind. He informed the police, and the police searched the ship and found a number of places in which the name *Ferret* had not been painted over properly.

Henderson and his wife, Wright and Walker had been expecting the police

and they were not at home. However, they were soon rounded up. Henderson had just sold the ship, and the police seized about seven thousand pounds in paper and six hundred golden sovereigns which he and his wife were carrying. His wife was not arrested, and the other members of the crew were not charged. The three ring-leaders were tried in Melbourne, and in spite of an able defence by Mr. J. L. Purvis, Q.C., they were all convicted. Henderson and Walker received seven years penal servitude apiece. Wright, who was held to be an employee and a lesser offender, went to prison for three and a half years.

Neither the Highland Railway Company nor Lloyds wished to go to the expense of bringing the *Ferret* back to Britain, so she was sold in Melbourne and renamed *Rosamund*.

She earned an honest living in the Australian coasting trade for many years, until she was driven ashore in a gale and wrecked.

Chapter Eight

THE PRISON HULKS

IMAGINE a chamber of horrors afloat, a Madame Tussauds in midocean, and you have some idea of a weird old ship, filled with wax effigies, that rounded the Cape over sixty years ago. She was the full-rigged ship *Success*, and it is possible that she was the oldest ship afloat when she sailed from Australia to London in 1895.

The *Success* was a frequent Table Bay visitor in the days of her youth. It was her return like a phantom, after years of dreadful service as a convict hulk, that made such a remarkable story. The convict ship *Neptune*, which South Africans recall with a shudder, had an uneventful career in comparison with the *Success*.

Sea historians still argue over the age of the *Success*, though there is no doubt that she was built of solid teak at Moulmein in Burma. Some say she was launched in 1798 as an East Indiaman. Captain W. H. Coates, an authority on Indian-built ships, was convinced that the *Success* belonged to the eighteenth century. Commander J. A. Rupert-Jones investigated the origin of the *Success* for the English historical journal "Notes and Queries" some years ago; and he, too, declared that the ship had been built before the end of the eighteenth century, and had been chartered by the British Government in 1802 to carry convicts to Australia. Joseph C. Harvie, a Melbourne business man who was part owner of the *Success* towards the end of last



The Success was a frequent Table Bay visitor in the days of her youth. It was her return like a phantom, after years of dreadfull service as a convict hulk that made such a remarkable story.

century, recorded his examination of the ship's bell. He was just able to decipher the inscription: "Success, 1790".

Frank Bowen, in his day a great expert on shipping history, held the view that the *Success* was built in 1840. He knew that she was employed as a convict hulk, but denied that she had ever been used as a convict transport.

I think the design and appearance of the *Success* support the earlier date. She was so massive, her decoration so elaborate, that she suggested the spacious and prosperous days of the Honourable Company. If that view is correct, she must have sailed the oceans during three centuries; surely a longer active career than any other ship ever launched.

Photographs which I have studied reveal the *Success* as a bluff and bulging cargo vessel rather than a fast clipper. She was one hundred and thirty-five feet long with a beam of nearly thirty feet, and her gross tonnage was about six hundred. Rising high above the water, she carried a beautiful woman as figurehead. Handsome windows decorated the square-cut stern, and her quarter galleries were elaborately carved. Gilded scrolls stood out against a rich blue background. From stem to stern the visitor came upon escutcheons and fine brass guns.

Within the hull were the huge breast-hooks, enormous beams and ponderous knees that gave her strength, and rendered her almost indestructible. Her stern cuddy was luxurious, with



Handsome windows decorated the square-cut stern, and her quarter galleries were elaborately carved. Her stern cuddy was luxurious.

oriental rugs trodden by Indian princes and nabobs, and merchants trading in silk and ivory and precious stones. They dressed for dinner in the old East Indiaman, but it must have been hard to keep the silver plate and cut glass on the table in the *Success*. She rolled her gunwales under when the sea was on the beam, and without lifelines her crew would have been swept away.

Some authorities state that the *Success* had a fight with a French privateer in the Bay of Bengal in 1815, and that she carried the shot marks on her hull until the end of her career. Her early voyages are obscure, but there is no doubt that she traded between England and India, and England and Australia, making a number of calls at the Cape about the middle of last century. R. A. Fletcher, author of "In the Days of the Tall Ships", stated that in 1849 the

Success carried passengers and convicts from Botany Bay to Tasmania. Various writers have said that she also took emigrants and convicts from England to Australia, but this is doubtful. Certainly the *Success* was not one of the regular convict transports, like the *Lady Juliana* and *Childe Harold*, that went down shamefully to history for the inhuman treatment of the convicts during their ghastly voyages. Yet the *Success* was to build up a tradition of her own for cruelty and horror.

It was the Australian gold rush in the middle of last century that was responsible for the *Success* becoming a convict hulk. Her crew deserted her in a body, and she was left at anchor in Geelong harbour. Among the horde of immigrants were many criminals. While lucky diggers were pelting

actresses with nuggets and shoeing their horses with gold, bushrangers were robbing and killing and escaping from the flimsy shore gaols. So the Victorian Government bought five old ships, including the *Success*, fitted them out as prison hulks, and moored them off Williamstown. •

Carpenters stripped the *Success* of her luxurious fittings. They built the unlighted cells on the lower deck where men lost their eyesight through long captivity in the dark. (Each living tomb had its Bible, but there was never a glimmer of light). They put up whipping posts and the dreaded “triangle” where men were flogged with a rawhide cat-o’-nine-tails, the strands bound with brass wire and tipped with pellets of lead. In the stern they constructed the “tiger’s den”, a cage for twenty of the most desperate

convicts, an inferno with iron bars. The chapel was placed in the bows, large enough for a dozen caged Christians; warders standing by with loaded rifles while the chaplain conducted the service from the far side of a barred and bolted door.

Some of Australia’s most dangerous criminals came to know the “Dark Cell Drill Ship”, as they called the *Success*. They arrived on board in detachments, bound and with leather masks over their faces. Each man was flung into a salt water bath and was scrubbed by warders with long brushes. (They named it the “coffin bath”, for men died in it after being flogged). Each man was branded on the palm of the hand with the broad arrow mark. The blacksmith riveted an anklet round each leg, carrying a chain and iron ball weighing seventy-two

pounds. The hard decks of the *Success* were scored and worn in hollows and grooves by those irons. Some convicts gave up all hope of freedom and jumped over the side to the sharks, the heavy iron balls clasped in their arms. Some went to their graves on shore wearing their chains.

Over the floating hell there dangled from a yardarm a warning in rope – a hangman’s noose.

For five years *Success* and her grim sisters lay at anchor, but never restfully. Head of the penal department was Captain John Price, son of a Cornish baronet; a man who had been in charge of the notorious Norfolk Island prison; a hard man who seemed to have steeled his heart against all convicts. Price made a point of going unarmed among the prisoners, relying on his own

magnificent physique if he was attacked.

It was in March 1857 that Price visited the shore quarries where a number of *Success* convicts were working. Thirty of these men set upon Price with pickaxes, and the tyrant of the convict hulks fell dead. After this affair fifteen convicts were sentenced to death and seven were hanged.

Good came out of evil. The murder of Price drew attention to the cruelty of the hulks, and one exposure followed another. Dr. John Singleton, a prison chaplain, gave valuable evidence. He declared that the system had built up in the convicts a deadly hatred of authority. They had become more like wild beasts than men. The newspapers denounced Price and said he had deserved his fate. One correspondent wrote to the Melbourne Age: “I have

seen the dungeons of Spielberg and experienced, as a visitor, the horrors of Continental gaols. I have crossed the Bridge of Sighs and been down to the uttermost depths of the prison where the Council of Ten immured their victims for ever; but not one of these is to be compared in refinement of cruelty and multiplication of horrors to the floating hell of Victoria.”

New prisons were built on shore. All the hulks except the Success were broken up. From 1860 to 1868 the Success was used as a women’s prison; then she served as a boys’ reformatory; and later the government stored gunpowder and ammunition on board the old hulk. Then she was sold, and she should have been broken up like the others; but owing to a clerical error in the deed of sale she remained afloat. A clever showman had gained

possession of the Success, and in 1884 her career as an exhibition ship began.

Many parts of the Success had remained unchanged since she had been fitted out for convicts. The dark cells were still there, and the torture cells where chains prevented the prisoner from sitting, kneeling or lying down. The speculators who had bought the Success also found a good supply of keys and handcuffs, rusty muskets and bayonets, pistols, iron necklets and leg-irons and manacles. Wax figures were placed in the cells to increase the realism. Harry Power, a former bushranger, was engaged as lecturer and guide. She was towed to Sydney, and thousands paid a shilling a head to see the horrors of the past.

It was a useful reminder of man’s inhumanity to man, but other thousands of Sydney residents did not wish

to see the disreputable past recalled in this way. There were protests. One night all the wax figures were mutilated beyond repair. Two months later the *Success* was scuttled, but the saboteurs were never found.

For six months the tough old teak *Success* lay on the bottom. However, the speculators had never forgotten the money that had flooded into their coffers while the ship was on show, and they decided to raise her. When she was hauled out of the water, eight auger holes were found in her solid teak planking. She was covered with barnacles and draped with seaweed. Australia had seen enough of her. The owners decided that the *Success* must go to sea again, in spite of her age, and draw unprejudiced crowds in the ports of Britain. They ordered a fresh and even more lifelike set of wax figures.

The *Success* was rigged and provided with sails.

Again there was an outcry, for at this period the Australians were anxious to destroy all relics of the old convict system. They had made public bonfires of convict records by order of the government, but here was the *Success* as an all too prominent survivor of the era everyone wished to forget. Efforts were made to prevent the *Success* from sailing, and she was refused clearance on the ground that she was unseaworthy. In spite of this order the *Success* left Port Jackson secretly early in 1895 with Captain W. Allan in command. Allan put into Adelaide, where proper clearance papers were secured, and then made sail for London via the Cape and St. Helena.

Gale after gale tested the old ship's masts and hull during the long and anxious passage. Not a spar was lost, not a weakness revealed in spite of her great age; but there were breathless moments. The original steering gear was still in use, with great iron beam-rings so that "kicking tackle" could be rigged. Sometimes when a heavy sea struck the Success full on the beam the tiller rebounded and the helmsman would be thrown violently to the deck. It was said that the Success had killed several seamen in this way in her time. Under the foot of the binnacle some bygone carpenter had inserted a piece of wood shaped like a coffin in memory of the ill-fated seamen.

I found another sidelight on that memorable voyage. "How she rolled!" wrote a passenger. "With the full weight of the wind on the quarter she

would slowly heel over, almost to the line of the gunwale. After a perilous pause, during which the crests of the rollers flew across the deck in spray, she would right herself majestically. Then, slanting slowly, she would plunge the opposite ends of her yards in the foam of the angry sea."

Off Madagascar the lightning was so vivid that a young seaman named Scoble was blinded, though he recovered his sight several days later. The passenger wrote: "Through the blackness of the night the intermittent blazes of electricity showed the spars and rigging and made the Success seem like a phantom ship with cordage all on fire."

This gale proved once again the seaworthy qualities of the Success. She had not been under canvas for more than forty years, but she was still

absolutely sound. The passenger noted that in calm weather the *Success* did not cleave the water like other ships. "One clear lift of rolling water extended on each side of her bluff bows and broke with a tumult of seething foam close to the cutwater," he wrote.

Captain Allan reported that one apparently superstitious skipper who encountered the *Success* off the Cape of Good Hope thought he had seen the *Flying Dutchman* and altered course to avoid the ghost ship!

St. Helena came in sight one hundred and ten days after leaving Adelaide, and the *Success* anchored off Jamestown for water. The island governor was shown round by Captain Allan. The former "tiger's den" was occupied by a lifelike tableau showing the murder of Captain Price. One of the

"black holes" on the lower deck was opened, and the governor saw the tiny, almost airless cell where one prisoner after another had spent as long as one hundred days in solitary confinement.

Among the wax figures were Captain Starlight the bush-ranger; James and George Loveless of Dorset, trade union leaders deported for "conspiracy;" members of the Kelly gang including handsome Kate Kelly; and many notorious criminals who had probably never even set eyes on the *Success*. But the realistic cavalcade of horrors was too much for some of the simple St. Helena islanders, and they fled in terror to their boats. They thought the ship was haunted by evil spirits.

Success made the Thames one hundred and sixty-six days after leaving Australia. (Compare this with the

performance of the clipper *Thermopylae*, which sailed from London to Melbourne in sixty days.) She was first moored in the East India Docks at Blackwall, where the Castle liners loaded in those days. Reporters flocked on board, and one of them described her as “the most remarkable ship to visit London since the days of the slave trade.”

King Edward VII and King George V were among the millions who visited the *Success* during her years in British waters. She circumnavigated Great Britain and Ireland twice, calling at many ports. Then, in 1912, she was bought by an American showman. Rigged as a barquentine, with Captain D. H. Smith in command, she left Liverpool for Boston on the very day that the ill-fated *Titanic* left Southampton on her first and last voyage.

The sinking of the *Titanic* overshadowed the safe but extremely slow crossing of the Atlantic made by the *Success*. She had a wireless transmitter, but no other modern improvements. Once she signalled the *Franconia* stating that the crew believed the old ship to be haunted, and were giving trouble. Probably the trouble arose from the fact that the men were worn out and half-starved. However, the *Success* made Boston under her own canvas in ninety-six days. The *New York Herald* declared that America had captured one of England’s most historic ships; while the *Boston Globe* claimed that no other ship approaching the age of the *Success* could have attempted the crossing. “This is the most noteworthy voyage since Columbus,” summed up the *Globe*.

Captain Smith acquired the old *Success* during her long and profitable cruises between the ports of America and Canada. When he took her through the Panama Canal in 1914, bound for San Francisco, she was the second sailing vessel to use the new waterway.

War interrupted the career of the *Success* as a showboat. She was fitted with a motor in 1917 to take advantage of the high freight rates. Soon afterwards the tough old ship met with her first serious accident, for she foundered after being damaged by ice at the junction of the Ohio and Kentucky rivers. After a time she was raised and fitted out as a waxworks showboat once more. In this familiar role she aroused great interest at the Chicago World Fair in 1933. By this

time it was estimated that twenty-one million people had visited her.

I believe this long-lived ship was still fairly complete up to 1946, when she was dismantled for the sake of her teak in Lake Erie Cove, Cleveland, Ohio. She caught fire while the work was in progress, and went up in smoke at last with all her unhappy memories. If she was as old as some authorities maintain, then the *Success* lived through the Napoleonic wars in her youth and survived Hitler. Her career was not glorious but at least one chapter of adventure followed another until the flames consumed her.

Another prison hulk comes to mind, less sinister than the *Success*, but still a ship with a most unhappy career. She was H.M.S. *Penelope*, the grotesque old battleship of such

wicked design that good seamen dreaded putting to sea in her.

I am sure that Simonstown has not yet forgotten the *Penelope*. If ever there was a ship that justified the traditional naval joke about “grounding on her own beef-bones and bottles at low tide,” *Penelope* was the one. Simon’s Bay must have looked empty after her departure, for she became a landmark indeed during the decades that she lay there.

For nearly four centuries there have been ships named *Penelope* in the Royal Navy. This one was famous as the first British battleship to be fitted with twin screws. Completed about ninety years ago, she cost four hundred thousand pounds. Her length was two hundred and sixty-five feet with fifty feet beam; but she had very shallow draught, as it was thought that

she might be used against Russia in Baltic waters or for some less obvious purpose on the Canadian lakes. Although she was given engines of nearly five thousand horse-power, *Penelope* was also ship rigged, with eighteen thousand square feet of canvas. She carried three hundred men, who hated her.

So there you have *Penelope* – a floating iron monstrosity, flat-bottomed, with a clipper bow and ram, projecting quarter-galleries and much ornamentation. Her screws could be lifted when she was under sail. This feature must have given her designers a headache, for they had contrived a double stern of such ungainly shape that a certain amount of speed was lost.

The designers had intended to produce a floating gun-platform from which

eight-inch guns could be fired with great accuracy. It did not work out like that. She rolled heavily and her officers declared that “she made leeway like a tea tray”.

However, *Penelope* went into action during the bombardment of Alexandria. Owing to her light draught she was able to operate close inshore, and as the weather was fine she distinguished herself in the attack on the western forts. She was hit several times, her main yard was shot away and a shell landed on her engine room gratings but failed to explode. In this engagement her heavy guns fired more than two hundred rounds. After the bombardment *Penelope* became flagship in the Suez Canal zone, but she saw no more active service.

It was in 1888 that *Penelope* rolled into Simon's Bay to serve as harbour

receiving ship. All hands hoped that she would never smell the open sea again, and it was a long time before she did. Kipling saw her lying off the Town Pier, (where the training ship *General Botha* lay some years afterwards) and wrote: “The old *Penelope*, that in ten years has been a bachelors' club, natural history museum, kindergarten and prison, rooted and dug at her fixed moorings.”

I have never been able to discover what Kipling meant by this description, apart from the prison reference. Naval records show that *Penelope* served as guard ship and store ship; and during the South African War, hundreds of Boer prisoners lived in the hulk.

Daring the years in harbour a number of deck-houses appeared on her superstructure, and her masts and yards

were cut down. This did not improve her looks, but she had long since been retired as a fighting machine, and no one objected.

Among the many roles *Penelope* played was one similar to *Success*. She was turned into a floating detention barracks towards the end of last century, a “punishment brig” where ill-behaved naval seamen were given every opportunity of mending their ways. Flogging had fallen into disuse at this period, but “shot drill” remained.

The victims stood in a circle. Each prisoner was required to pick up a thirty-two pound cannon-ball, carry it waist high for fifteen yards and then lower it to the deck. But there was no rest for the weary at that stage. They had to pick up other cannon-balls immediately and repeat the cruel,

useless procedure until they were utterly exhausted.

Naval discipline was even more rigid in those days that it is now, and the prisoners obeyed orders even when their backs seemed to be breaking. At last one seaman refused to carry out the shot drill routine. He was brought before a court of inquiry at which a notorious bully, Captain R. C. Prothero, was president. (This was the same Prothero who commanded the naval brigade during the South African War – a huge man with a black beard and face like a seafaring Shylock). Prothero, to the dismay of the naval authorities, ordered the rebellious seaman to be flogged.

I tried to gather details of this strange episode at the Admiralty Library in London. Other information was supplied with great courtesy, but I was

told that Courts of Inquiry were always secret. Some of the facts must have leaked out at the time, however, and Prothero was denounced by the redoubtable editor Labouchere in the London critical weekly Truth. Altogether the *Penelope* came in for some most unpleasant publicity. I believe that the man who was flogged aboard her was the last naval rating to receive that punishment. Prothero must have escaped official blame, however, for he retired in 1904 as Rear-Admiral Prothero, C.B., M.V.O.

Penelope ended her naval career in 1912, when she was sold by the Admiralty to Mr. Isaac Ochberg of Cape Town for £1650. Mr. Ochberg had no intention of operating as a battleship owner. His idea was to have her towed to Germany and sold as scrap metal. Although he was experi-

enced in other forms of business, Mr. Ochberg lived to regret this venture.

First the old battleship had to go into the Simonstown dry dock, for she had swung at her moorings for years. Lt. Colonel H. L. Jones, R.M., who was present, told me that the flat bottom was a wonderful sight, feet deep in barnacles. When this growth dried and rotted, the aroma shocked even the oldest dockyard hands.

A movement was started to buy the hulk and moor her at Durban as a training ship for the merchant service. The scheme failed. The tug *Oceana* arrived from Britain and towed *Penelope* round the Cape to Table Bay Docks. During this brief passage the tug master realised that the long tow to Europe would be anything but easy. Already the battleship was leaking badly. They pumped the old *Penelope*

dry, however, patched her up and loaded her with scrap-iron in the hope of giving her more stability. Simon's Bay had said farewell to the hulk after almost a quarter of a century; and now, after months of delay, everyone at Table Bay Docks turned out to watch the troublesome veteran putting to sea in the wake of the tug *Oceana*.

Next day, *Oceana* and *Penelope* were back in Table Bay Docks. The tug master reported that *Penelope* was still unseaworthy, and before long it became clear that he was unwilling to tow the old battleship to Europe. Indeed, he went so far as to secure affidavits from other master mariners declaring that the *Penelope* was unfit to proceed to sea. Dock dues and expenses were piling up, and so were the legal costs. And no doubt Mr.

Isaac Ochberg cursed the day when he had become a battleship owner.

At this critical point some wise old seafarer gave Mr. Ochberg a word of advice. "Get a Dutch tug," suggested the seafarer. Dutch tugs were almost as famous in 1914 as they are today. Even then, most people who wanted a floating dock towed across the world, or a floating crane or dredger or mud barge delivered, went to Smit of Rotterdam. Mr. Ochberg went to Smit, and before long the powerful tug *Roode Zee* arrived in Table Bay. She had crossed from Buenos Aires, where she had taken a floating dock. The *Roode Zee* had two high funnels, and between them stood a wireless cabin – still a novelty in those days.

Captain Rees of the *Roode Zee* looked over the *Penelope* and decided that it would be possible to tow her safely.

By this time the deal with the German scrap-metal firm had fallen through, but an Italian firm in Genoa offered to buy *Penelope* on arrival. So the battleship left Table Bay for the last time. Once she broke away from the *Roo de Zee*, in the middle of the South Atlantic, but Captain Rees knew how to deal with that emergency. He allowed her to drift for eighteen hours while the wind was at gale force. Then he picked her up, and reached Genoa in the remarkable time of thirty-four days from Table Bay.

Penelope had gained the reputation of a hoodoo. Even after she had been tied up in the breaker's yard there were accidents which made seamen shake their heads. Soon after arrival a party was held in the wardroom. The Dutch consul had almost reached the gangway when he fell and broke both legs.

Several men were killed while *Penelope* was being dismantled. Mr. Ochberg escaped physical injury but lost money on the deal.

If *Penelope* had gone to Germany, her wonderful metal would certainly have been used against Britain in World War I. As it was, the Italians removed much of the armour plate bodily and incorporated it in new Italian men-o'-war which fought the enemy in the Adriatic.

Such was the end of the prison hulk that once seemed to have become as permanent in Simon's Bay as the dockyard itself.



Chapter Nine

THREE MEN SURVIVED

PROBABLY there are still people living in South Africa who lost friends or relations in the *Drummond Castle* wreck. That was the most serious disaster to a South African liner ever known in peace-time, and rarely even in war records will you find a heavier death-roll. There were just three survivors.

Captain W. W. Pierce of the *Drummond Castle* belonged to a seafaring era in which the names of shipmasters appeared in almost every shipping advertisement. They were not paid much, but they were greater figures than they are today. At the end of a happy run the passengers often presented the captain with an illuminated address. One selected a certain ship because one's favourite captain was in command. And of course the captain who gained a pleasant reputation in this way might also find himself promoted to a larger and better ship.

I have always doubted the wisdom of making a social lion of a sea captain. He has problems to solve on the bridge without having to entertain a charmed circle at the "captain's table" and elsewhere. However there is not so

much of that sort of thing as there used to be. Nowadays the purser and his staff do most of that work admirably.

But after a careful study of the evidence I think that the loss of the *Drummond Castle* may have been due to Captain Pierce attempting to do two jobs at the same time. No modern liner captain would dream of acting as Captain Pierce did on the night the *Drummond Castle* was lost.

For years after that wreck, whenever the *Drummond Castle* was mentioned, many knowing people in South Africa would repeat an entirely false rumour. "Of course, all the officers were dancing," they would say. That was obviously untrue, though there was a dance on that last night, and another entertainment at which Captain Pierce had been present.

Captain Pierce had spent his whole sea life in the old Castle Line; first as an apprentice in their sailing ships; later in command of the full-rigged ship *Pembroke Castle*; then as an officer in their steamers and as master of the coasting steamer *Courland*; master of the intermediate passenger liner *Dunbar Castle* (built in 1883); and finally in command of the former mail steamer *Drummond Castle*, transferred to the intermediate service two years previously.

Passengers called the *Drummond Castle* the "dear, dilatory *Drummond*," for she was no flyer. Nevertheless, they liked her spacious cabins and they knew she would be steady in heavy weather. She was a ship of nearly four thousand tons, fifteen years old, with one funnel. First, second and third class passengers were

carried. In the first class she had marble baths and a drawing-room with a grand piano. She had been “modernised” not long before her last voyage, and the novelties included electric-light.

Gaily the crowd waved the packed *Drummond Castle* out of Table Bay Docks on May 28, 1896, before going home in hansom-cabs and horse-trams. The liner steamed out in fine weather, her passengers looking forward to the English summer at the end of the run of three weeks. Las Palmas was the only port of call. Seven passengers joined the ship there, making a total of 245 souls on board – 141 passengers and 104 officers and crew. The ship left Las Palmas on June 12 for London.

On the night of Tuesday, June 16, the *Drummond Castle* had crossed the Bay

of Biscay and was closing in with the coast of France near the dreaded Cape Ushant, graveyard of ships. Ushant is, of course, an island, and there is a narrow channel between island and mainland used by coasters. Between Ushant and a small island to the south runs the Fronveur Sound, and at the entrance to the sound is the reef called Pierres Vertes. Ushant is known to the Bretons as the “island of terror.”

It was a night of drizzle and thick fog, but the passengers hardly noticed the weather. Dancing was followed by a farewell concert in the first saloon. A series of the *tableaux vivants* beloved by Victorian audiences had been organised. These included “Babes in the Wood.”

Among the first-class passengers was a clean-shaven mine accountant named Charles Marquardt, an



The ill-fated Drummond Castle in the days when the southbound Currie liners called at Dartmouth to pick up the mails.

Englishman of thirty-five with a fine physique. As he was the only passenger to survive the wreck, his narrative is important. Marquardt recorded the fact that the captain appeared at the end of the concert, remained for five minutes and made a pleasant little speech in reply to a vote of thanks.

Two seamen were saved from the wreck. One, named Godbold, remembered hearing the last songs and the laughter at the concert, and he saw Captain Pierce returning to the bridge. The third survivor was a quartermaster named Wood.

All three survivors agreed that the concert ended at about ten-thirty. Some of the passengers strolled on deck afterwards, but it was so wet that most of them went to their cabins.

Ushant light, which should have been in sight, was hidden by the fog.

At eleven Marquardt was in the smoking-room, talking to a naval warrant officer, Boatswain Motyer, one of ten naval men travelling as passengers. Marquardt asked Motyer whether he was thinking of turning in.

"No. Whenever there's a fog on I never go to bed," replied Motyer. "I stay on deck all night."

No sooner had he spoken than they heard a loud grating noise and the deck tilted. "That's a collision," guessed Motyer. They rushed out. It was very dark. The bridge telegraph rang loudly as they ran forward, and the engines stopped.

Marquardt noticed that the bow was low in the water. He saw the seamen ripping the canvas covers off the

boats, and hurried to his cabin for his life jacket. He also grabbed an overcoat, expecting to spend a cold night in an open boat. However, no boat left the doomed *Drummond Castle*. There was no time. Marquardt had only just regained the deck when the ship slid forward at such an angle that he found it impossible to stand.

“The only person I noticed on deck was a fellow passenger named Hinds,” recalled Marquardt. “He asked me for a lifebelt, and I told him he would find a spare one in my cabin. I made my way to an awning stanchion and hauled myself up on to the rail. A tremendous roaring filled the air as the engineers opened the valves of the boilers to allow the steam to escape. All the lights went out. A moment later I found myself in the sea.”

Marquardt heard one scream, but most of the people had been trapped down below, and the escaping steam covered the cries of those who were drowning. Another deafening noise was caused by the rush of air through the portholes as the ship went down.

It seems that the *Drummond Castle* remained on the surface for no more than four minutes after striking a reef. (It was the Pierres Vertes reef which I have mentioned.) The *Titanic* gave her people nearly three hours to launch the few boats they had; but the six boats along the superstructure of the *Drummond Castle* never left the davits.

Once the ship had gone. Marquardt heard people shouting in terror. A spar drifted past him and as he grasped it he saw that eight or nine others were holding on for their lives. But they had

not the stamina of Marquardt. They dropped off, until Marquardt found himself with only Fourth Officer P. S. Ellis.

Ellis and Marquardt made a triangular raft of driftwood. It was so frail that they could not raise themselves clear of the bitter sea; but it was something that floated and they clung to it together for a long time. Ellis slipped off, exhausted. Marquardt remained, with bodies drifting past him. The raft broke up at last, but he still had the spar. Now and again he came within reach of a fruit box, and ate some oranges and tomatoes. He was twelve hours in the water and almost unconscious when an Ushant fisherman named Berthelet picked him up.

Godbold the seaman was attending to the awnings when the ship struck. "Clear away the boats!" shouted an

officer from the bridge. The second officer and carpenter went forward and reported: "She's making water fast." Godbold went to his boat station. There was no panic, but four passengers tried to climb into his boat before it was ready. "Let's get the boat swung out first," Godbold told them. "Then we can save you."

But as he spoke, everyone was swept away. The ship had dropped off the reef into deep water. "Such a cry went up as I hope I may never hear again," Godbold declared. "It was the united voice of the doomed. Some who had not been drawn into the vortex were struggling for life. From the sea came pitiful appeals."

Godbold was hurled across the boat-deck by the water. He was close to the bridge, and he remembered seeing Milne, an elderly quartermaster, at the



But as he spoke, everyone was swept away. The ship had dropped off the reef into deep water.

wheel, his face illuminated by the paraffin binnacle light. All the electric lights had gone out. Milne remained at his post as though petrified, gripping the wheel and staring at the compass.

“I went down and down,” reported Godbold. I was between the bridge and the funnel, and I feared that I was inside the funnel.

It was the most ghastly moment of my life. Yet somehow I came to the surface when I could hold my breath no longer.” Fortunately the sea was calm. Godbold saw that it was strewn with deck fittings, seats and wreckage. He found a hatch. For about half an hour the cries for help rose from the dark sea. Then there was an awful stillness.

Someone groaned close by, and Godbold recognised a trimmer. “It’s

cold, isn’t it,” said the trimmer. Then he let go and was drowned.

It was the coldness of the sea that killed many of the people that night. There was enough driftwood to keep a number of them afloat, but they could not stand the temperature.

Godbold heard another groan. This time it was the quartermaster Wood. “Got room for two?” inquired Wood. Godbold helped him. At dawn the tide carried them near the shore, but a current swept them out again. They went through nine hours of agony before the Breton fishermen hauled them into a boat. They were half-dead with cold. The fishermen stripped them, rubbed them, put their own warm clothes on the two seamen. At eleven that morning Godbold and Wood were carried on shore. They were put to bed, but they could not

sleep. Soon they crawled down to the beach to see whether any others had been saved.

Marquardt sent the first news of the disaster to London. He drank hot tea and brandy and slept for two hours after his rescuers had landed him; but when he awoke the tragedy dawned on him and he wrote out the telegram which was to bring the merciless shock of sudden death into hundreds of homes.

“Drummond Castle total loss off Ushant,” telegraphed Marquardt to the Castle Company. “Am probably sole survivor.” The two seamen had landed elsewhere, and he had not yet heard of their rescue.

Above the anguish of the disaster there comes down the years a memory of the kindness and humanity of the

Breton fisher-folk who cared for the three survivors and buried the dead. The men were at sea fishing when the first bodies drifted ashore. So the sad task of carrying the dead to the lifeboat station (which was turned into a mortuary) fell upon the women.⁵

A French naval tug, *La Laborieux*, joined the fishing fleet in the search for survivors. There were no more survivors.

Two thousand people, every man, woman and child on Ushant who could walk, formed the great funeral procession on Saturday, June 20, 1896. They were poor as only a fishing community could be, but they

⁵ Queen Victoria issued a special *Drummond Castle* commemorative medal as a token of gratitude, and this was awarded to about two hundred and fifty Ushant islanders for trying to save life or recovering bodies.

wore their Breton costumes and the graves were piled high with flowers. Coffins they could not provide for all, and many of the seventy-three bodies washed up were buried in common graves. Marquardt, Godbold and Wood always remembered the continuous tolling of the bell as the long procession reached the graveyard.

Marquardt had another ordeal to face when he reached London two days later. He found the Castle Line offices filled with frantic wives and mothers. Stricken with grief, they held up photographs and begged for news. Some were worried without cause. "Many a young Englishman has disappeared from view in South Africa, and his relatives at home are terrified lest he should be lying stark and dead off Ushant," wrote Marquardt. "So much there is to anxious

hearts in the slightest similarity of names." But for many the news was as bad as it could be. Day after day Marquardt sat in the Fenchurch Street shipping office to be interviewed by inconsolable crowds of mourners.

Cape Town heard the news on the morning of June 18, and the *Cape Argus* brought out a special edition with a full passenger list. Two daughters of the Cape Town city engineer were among the lost: Geraldine Olive, aged fifteen, and Beatrice Olive, thirteen. Sub-Inspector Martin of the Cape Dockyard Police, Mrs. Andrews, wife of the manager of the celebrated Hatherley distillery, the whole Mercer family of Barberton, were other victims. Mrs. Barnett of Johannesburg and her daughter had just escaped death in the frightful Glencoe railway disaster only to perish in the

Drummond Castle. Towns all over South Africa were in mourning.

South Africa had such a small white population in those days that nearly everyone knew someone on board the *Drummond Castle*. Every flag in the country went to half-mast. Every theatre and concert-hall was closed. Sir Gordon Sprigg, prime minister of the Cape Colony, spoke on the disaster in the House of Assembly that afternoon and moved the adjournment as a mark of sympathy.

It was a tremendous blow for Sir Donald Currie, as his Castle Line had not lost a single passenger during the quarter of a century that they had been operating. The court of inquiry absolved the company from all blame, for the ship was well-found and properly manned. Captain Pierce was rightly found responsible for the loss of the

ship. The court declared that he was going too fast in view of the fog, and that he should have taken soundings to check his position. This would have informed him that the ship had been set inshore by the strong current.

Godbald joined the British lightship service, and had a second narrow escape when a steamer cut right into the anchored lightship. Once again he found himself struggling in the water, but rescue came much more quickly on that occasion. It was the *Drummond Castle* that shattered Godbald's nerves. Years afterwards he said that the tragedy would live with him to the end of his life.

The *Drummond Castle* went down in thirty fathoms. She had gold on board, and in 1929 the Italian diver Franchesci reached the liner from the salvage ship *Artiglio*. He reported a thirty-foot

rent in the hull near the bows, and brought up a fragment of steel plating. (This is now in Lloyd's marine insurance museum in London). But the gold still lies with the drowned people off the rocky island of Ushant.

Would the *Drummond Castle* have been lost if Captain Pierce had not left the bridge that foggy night to make his pleasant little farewell speech in the saloon? Perhaps she would have met the same fate. She was nearing the end of the run and the captain was in a hurry. It would not be so dangerous today, with echo-sounding, radio direction finders and radar. Yet liners slow down in fog even now for fear of colliding with blind vessels which are not equipped with modern devices.

On land and sea and in the air it is usually the human factor that causes the greatest disasters. Captain Pierce

sank the *Drummond Castle*, and she went down fast.



Chapter Ten

SOUTH AFRICA'S OWN SHIPS

SHIPBUILDING is not such a recent industry in South Africa as you might imagine. It flourished in Van Riebeeck's time, and started much earlier. Shipwrecked crews of long ago were resourceful men. They knew full well that no one would come to their rescue, so they put together new

ships from shattered hulls and sailed home at last.

I possess a sort of vested interest in local shipbuilding. Thirty years ago I watched my own five-ton sloop becoming a reality day after day, from designer's board to the moment when the champagne bottle cracked on her bows. This sounds magnificent, but a yacht of that size cost only three hundred pounds, with sails, thirty years ago. She is still afloat, and worth more today than I paid for her.

This is a fine old trade and an honest one. Oak, stinkwood, yellowwood and other timber from Cape forests have gone into all sorts of craft for more than three centuries. They build steel ships at Table Bay Docks nowadays, ships more than one hundred feet long; diesel trawlers, barges, fishery research ships, even naval transport



Shipbuilding is not such a recent industry in South Africa as you might imagine. It flourished in Van Riebeeck's time, and started much earlier.

vessels. But the South African wooden ships of the past make a more romantic story.

Van Riebeeck's first local boat was a thirty-two footer launched two years after his arrival and designed to carry salt, wood and manure from the Salt River to the Fort. His next venture was more ambitious. He sent men into the forests to select timber for a decked vessel more than fifty feet in length, and capable of making ocean voyages. This was the adventurous *Robbejacht*, designed mainly for sealing and taking cargoes to and from Robben Island, Dassen Island and Saldanha Bay. She was also used for piloting large ships into Table Bay. Practically all her timber came from Hout Bay and other Cape Peninsula forests. A few imported oaken boards were used, as the first local oaks had only just been planted.

When the *Robbejacht* went sealing the crew received a few "comforts" to encourage them. Wine, tin dishes and plates, butter, sugar, plums and candles were supplied. But life was seldom tranquil on board the *Robbejacht*. She was attacked by Hottentots while lying close to the beach at Saldanha, and a gun and all the coffee and tobacco carried for barter were looted. Then the *Robbejacht* was sent with the sloop *Maria* to explore the West African coast and bring back slaves. The *Robbejacht* became a total loss on the Gold Coast, though her crew escaped and marched to Elmina castle safely.

Van Riebeeck appealed to his directors for a new ship to replace the *Robbejacht*. However, they pointed out that he had built the *Robbejacht* and a sister the *Schaapejacht* successfully

and there was no reason why he should not build others. The *Schaapejacht* carried sheep for a time. She was sold to the free burghers who traded in penguin eggs, fish, seal oil, dried seal meat and salted birds. Once she sailed to Saldanha loaded with carrots and turnips, beets and radishes, milk and eggs, for the scurvy-stricken men of a Dutch ship. A trumpeter sailed as captain on that trip, and one man was regarded as a sufficient crew. The *Schaapejacht* was lost on Robben Island, but the thrifty Hollanders built a smaller sloop from the wreckage.

A fine shipbuilding achievement of the early days was the large sloop *Bruidegom*. She brought cargo after cargo of blue slabs of Robben Island slate to the mainland for Cape Town's kitchen floors, stoops and graves. This was the ship in which some prisoners

on Robben Island tried to escape; the first of many attempts through the centuries. After a useful career of eleven years she was lost at Saldanha. Bruidegom's Hoek, near the lagoon entrance in Saldanha Bay, was named after her, but the name does not appear on modern charts.

Another fifty-footer called the *Voerman* was laid down soon after the *Bruidegom* went to sea. It took the combined strength of the whole garrison to haul the *Voerman* into the water. A "merry dinner" followed. The *Voerman* carried dried fish, salt and sheep along the coast for several years; but this dull routine was varied by one voyage to Madagascar and Mauritius for ebony and amber. Her crew landed at St. Francis Bay (near Algoa Bay) during this voyage, and were attacked by lions. The *Voerman*

was lost on Vondeling Island, outside Saldanha.

Two more seventeenth-century vessels built at the Cape were the *Oester* and the *Schulp*. Many prisoners were carried to Robben Island on board the *Oester*. She was not designed for beating to windward, and the south-easters often blew her out to sea. Her crew nearly died of hunger and thirst on several occasions. Some of her men deserted while the unpopular *Oester* was lying at anchor in Hout Bay, and vanished into the forests. The *Schulp* was the ship in which Eva, the troublesome Hottentot, travelled back from her exile on Robben Island.

I have mentioned the castaways who built ships when the South African coastline was still wild and unexplored. The greatest recorded enterprise of this kind followed the wreck

in 1686 of the spice-laden Dutch East India ship *Stavenisse* on the Natal coast near the present Port Shepstone. Some of her survivors joined forces with a party of Englishmen who had lost their ketch *Good Hope* at the entrance to the bay of Natal. They decided to build a new ship, but they had no saw. Iron bolts and rings were fetched from the wreck of the *Stevenisse*, while the *Good Hope* provided the timber. A craftsman named Kingston made a saw from an iron ring. Within a year they had a seaworthy vessel, the *Centaurus*, at their disposal.

By this time the two crews had been joined by survivors from a third wreck. Some decided to remain in Natal, but the others provisioned the *Centaurus* with millet and smoked meat, goats, fowls and pumpkins, and

sailed safely to the Cape. So fine a vessel was the *Centaurous* that she remained in service on the Cape coast for many years.

Government shipbuilding seems to have ended at the Cape with the *Oester* and *Schulp*, and there was no private enterprise to take over the industry. A revival came early in the nineteenth century, when shipwrights were busy not only on the shores of Table Bay but in the forgotten harbour of Port Beaufort and at Knysna and the Kowie. Port Elizabeth, East London and Port Natal entered the trade later.

Small vessels were built at Algoa Bay before the 1820 Settlers arrived. A coaster named the *Thomas* was launched when there were only thirty-five white people at the Bay; when the whole settlement consisted of the stone Residency, two mud cottages, a

few pondoks and two farms. The *Thomas* loaded cargoes of hides and skins, kegs of butter and bags of salt. Then came the schooner *Uitenhage Packet*, specially built for trading up the Zwartkops river. She entered the river safely on her maiden voyage in 1819, but was wrecked on the rocks at the mouth while leaving.

Knysna became a British Admiralty shipyard in 1820, but before the first vessel, a brig, had been completed the yard was transferred to Simonstown. The mysterious George Rex laid down his famous two-masted brig *Knysna* (140 tons) at Knysna six years later. She was still afloat and sailing as a collier early this century, a wonderful tribute to local craftsmanship and the seasoned stinkwood that went into her.

Cape Town builders launched the schooner *Elizabeth* in 1821 for the

Kowie trade. Both skill and nerve were need to cross the dangerous bar into the Kowie river. The *Elizabeth* crossed safely and loaded a cargo of local produce, hides, fats and butter, and the beef and pork cured in the district by Mr. Henry Nourse, a London merchant. However, the *Elizabeth* escaped the perils of the river only to be wrecked on Cape Receife.

Hatton the carpenter, King and his companions at Port Natal launched the *Tshaka* (later named *Elizabeth and Susan*) in 1828, and she started her first voyage with Farewell and King on board in April of that year. She also carried two of Chaka's indunas as envoys on an unsuccessful mission to Port Elizabeth. The little ship later carried ivory to Algoa Bay and there she was seized by the authorities on

the ground that she had no register. Sold by the Customs, she traded along the Cape coast for some years.

Port Natal does not seem to have produced another ship until the middle of last century, when the small coaster *Albion* was launched. She carried pineapples and potatoes, butter and mealies to the Buffalo River. The same firm built the cutter *Herald* for this early trade in Natal farm produce.

Cape Town claimed to have built the first South African steamer. This was in 1863 and she was launched in Table Bay, but I can find no further reference to her. In the same year the little iron steamer *Emma Scot* slid into the water at Port Natal. Her ten horse power engine gave her a speed of seven knots. Apparently she always worked inside the bay as tug and pilot

boat. It is not clear whether she was built, or merely assembled, in Natal.

Nearly all the leading South African shipbuilders had their yards on the edge of Table Bay during the second half of last century. They turned out a fleet of brigs and schooners, including a few grand little ships which were never forgotten until sail vanished from the seas – ships like the *Walter Glendinning* and *Lord of the Isles*, *Springbok* and *Western Province*.

De Pass, Spence, the guano people, were also shipbuilders. Robertson and Bain were able to build a small brigantine, the *Assegai*, just over a century ago for £675! At the same period Murray and Prince launched the *African Maid* (148 tons) at the North Wharf and claimed it as the largest vessel ever built in Table Bay. After the launching ceremony by Miss

Emma Jarvis a “large and smart company sat down to a very liberal repast”.

Some of the old firms specialised in fishing craft. For many years the *buis* of the Netherlands influenced the design, but the typical open fishing boat still seen on Table Bay and far beyond was the work of an Englishman. His name was White, and he was trained by the famous Cowes firm of that name. White took a partner named Beck; but to the coloured fishermen they were always “Black and White”. They created a fishing boat design known as the *Springbok*, and this model became the standard design and was copied widely.

Knysna, with its forests, was bound to become a shipbuilding centre. Among those who followed George Rex’s example were the Benns, the redoubt-



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able Benns who piloted so many ships across the bar. John Benn, the first of the dynasty, arrived at Simonstown as a shipwright in 1838, and reached Knysna seventeen years later to build a ship for Captain Horne, then owner of the Royal Hotel. That was the *Rover*, one of the most famous of all the Cape schooners.

I heard the story of the Benns from John Benn the second. He was then almost ninety, a tall, fresh-faced, white-bearded man; and in spite of his age, he was building a boat when I called on him at his house in Benn's Avenue, Knysna. (Houses in this road were all occupied by the son, grandsons and great-grandsons of the original John Benn). Yes, there was the first John Benn's son fitting the seats in a brand new dinghy.

Benn told me that his father ran the pont at Malagas on the Breede River before he settled at Knysna as shipbuilder and harbour pilot. After building the *Rover*, Benn the first, helped by his sons John and Donald, laid down the *Annie Benn*, named after his wife. White els was used for the frames, stinkwood and yellowwood for the planking. (At present-day prices, the cost of such timber would be ruinous.) Captain Stubbington, master of the *Annie Benn* when she became a Cape coast trader, had such a contempt for engines that he refused the command of a steamer when it was offered to him. He lost the *Annie Benn* in a gale at Mossel Bay.

Four generations of Benns piloted ships into Knysna before the harbour lost its official status as a seaport. Ten years ago the Knysna municipality

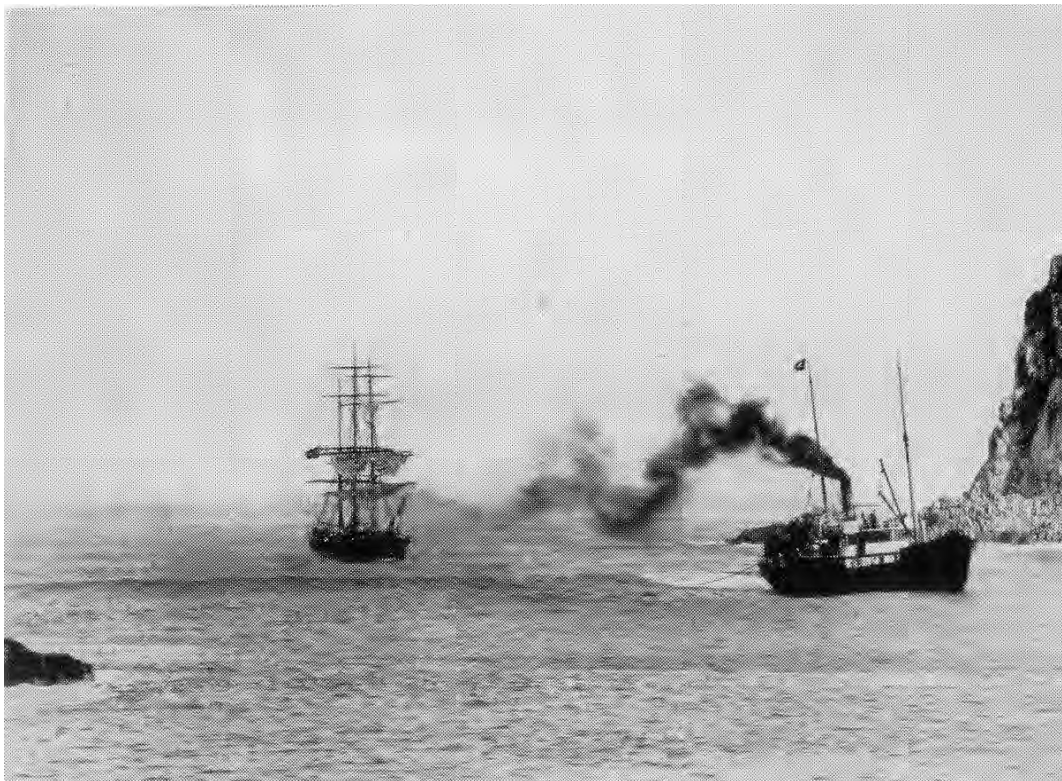
commissioned a model of George Rex's brig *Knysna*, made from a cache of old stinkwood unearthed at the spot where the brig was built. The man who made that model was Roland Benn, professional boat-builder, great-grandson of the first John Benn.

Knysna still builds many types of small craft. I was cruising on a lake in Central Africa nearly a thousand miles from the nearest sea not long ago, and I happened to see a small brass plate screwed to the stern. The words "Made in Knysna" recalled the day when I looked out across the water while old John Benn told me how he had gone to sea under sail in the brig *Galatea*, wrecked on Woodstock beach in the 1865 gale. It seemed a long way, a long time ago.

Simonstown has had its shipbuilders, of course, and several fine schooners

were launched there last century. Old residents may recall a strange character named J. R. Black, who made a living not only as a shipwright but also by collecting natural history specimens for museums. Dr. R. W. Coppinger, a naval surgeon, found Black in possession of a very large and valuable egg of the extinct *Aepyornis*, the wingless Madagascar bird. Black had bought it from the supercargo of a trading schooner, and he sold it at a handsome profit.

With this money available the eccentric Black decided to build a ship with his own hands, and without help of any sort. He quoted Noah to friends who tried to reason with him. Black designed a schooner of one hundred tons, and spent the last fifteen years of his life on this herculean task.



Four generations of Benns piloted ships into Knysna before the harbour lost its official status as a seaport.

He laid the keel, cut the huge timbers to shape, set up steam troughs and bent the planking, and drove the copper bolts securing the stem and stern posts and timbers. His strength and determination astounded everyone in Simonstown. All who lived there late last century went to see Black's schooner from time to time. Sometimes the old man fell from the scaffolding and cut himself, but he simply washed off the blood, treated the wound with Stockholm tar, and returned to his work.

Black was still pottering about on board his schooner when he died. It was then found that parts of the keel and timbers had decayed, and the schooner never felt the touch of salt water. She was broken up for firewood where she lay. South Africa has known many shipbuilding enterprises

since Van Riebeeck launched his *Robbejacht*, but I think "Black's Folly" must head the list of unlaunched craft with queer stories.

As a contrast, I may recall the fishing ketch *Star of Africa*, built by Henri de Villiers in 1922 and 1923 on Witsands beach, only about five miles from the scene of poor Black's labour. De Villiers, who likes to describe himself as a farm boy, is really an experienced shipwright and seagoing skipper. He made a model from his own design, felled his timber in the Tokai forests, and built the large ketch with only farm hands to help him.

Soon after launching, while De Villiers was testing the *Star of Africa* for the first time, he was caught out in a gale. He was blown out to sea without food or fresh water. Fortunately he was able to catch some

rain water, but he was starving when he brought the ketch back to False Bay.

De Villiers remained in command of the *Star of Africa* for thirty-four years. Every season he sailed her up to Walvis Bay. From the decks of the seaworthy ketch he had built, De Villiers and his crew hooked more than two million snoek. De Villiers left the *Star of Africa* to take charge of the schooner *Kernwood*. But the craft he built from Cape Peninsula timber was still absolutely sound after nearly forty years at sea. Van Riebeeck's craftsmen from Holland could not have built a finer little ship. And now Francois de Villiers, Henri's nephew, is in the boat-building trade. A self-taught carpenter, he has built dozens of mahogany dinghies and several larger crafts. It runs in the family.



Chapter Eleven

SEA GYPSIES

MEN and women have sailed across the oceans and reached the harbours of South Africa in much smaller craft than the Phoenicians used, smaller vessels than Chinese junks or Arab dhows. I have always made a point of listening to the sea gypsies, especially the lone hands, for they are not as other men.

Some of these adventurers wrote their own stories, and often told them well. I am more concerned here with the unknown or forgotten ocean wanderers, including the men who sailed far and wide long before Slocum and my dear old friend Harry Pidgeon circled the world.

It is hard to say when the first cockleshell navigator set out deliberately to conquer the oceans. I have found mention of a Portuguese seaman, James Bottellier, who sailed from India in 1539 in a cutter eighteen feet long and with a beam of six feet. His motive, according to the English traveller Samuel Purchas, was to “recover the favour” of King John III. He coasted along Arabian and East African shores, “doubled the terrible Cape”, missed St. Helena completely, but survived all the perils of the

Atlantic. Purchas noted that Bottellier “came yet safe to Lisbone and was worthily welcomed for daring to encounter Neptune’s strongest forces notwithstanding such weak furniture”.

Possibly there is a detailed account of Bottellier’s voyage in some dusty filing cabinet. Historians are aware that the archives of Portugal still hold much drama in documents which have not yet been properly examined.

I have mentioned two famous American circumnavigators, but Richard Cleveland of Salem, Massachusetts, has been forgotten as a master of small craft even in his own country. Cleveland sailed from France to Cape Town in the little cutter *Caroline* at the end of the eighteenth century. He dreaded Spanish and French privateers more than any heavy weather. His vivid logbook reveals a character (like Harry

Pidgeon) who never touched “wine, porter, ale, beer or any beverage stronger than tea or coffee”. He never smoked. At sixty-eight he claimed that his life had been free from illness. This was at a period, according to Cleveland, when “drinking grog and chewing tobacco were two essential requisites for making a good seaman”.

Cleveland’s firm in Salem had sent the first American merchant ships to Cape Town and Mauritius. After serving his time as a cadet Cleveland bought the *Caroline* at Havre for one thousand dollars and set off on a trading voyage of his own. His cargo of manufactured goods was valued at three thousand dollars.

I could not discover the exact size of the *Caroline*, but young Cleveland noted that many tried to dissuade him from sailing as it was considered

dangerous in such a small craft. Seamen engaged one day would desert the next. Finally he set out with a mate, two landsmen and a boy. "The mate could fish a spar, caulk a seam or make a bucket or barrel," Cleveland recorded. "He was steady and faithful, and saved me much anxiety."

Another man had been a Prussian grenadier, but he was a coward aloft and knew little English. The cook was a tall negro. The boy was French and vivacious. He had served in a French man-o'-war and had learnt English in an English prison; but Cleveland remarked sadly: "His choice of words did not indicate much care in the teacher."

As the little *Caroline* steered south, a privateer with lateen sails fired on her. The balls fell short, but the privateer used her sweeps and came alongside.

She was French, and when her captain found that Cleveland was a neutral in the war between Britain and France, he was allowed to go.

Table Mountain was sighted on March 21, 1798, and by this time the *Caroline* was short of food and water. A man-o'-war's boat met Cleveland, and he was taken to Government House to see Admiral Sir Hugh Christian and give him the news of Europe. "We had many visitors, attracted by the boyish appearance of the master and mate, the queer characters in the crew, and the long voyage," Cleveland wrote. (They had been at sea for five months without a single port of call.) "Some believed we were French spies, and our voyage was the principal topic of conversation in Cape Town for a week after our arrival. My ship was searched for dispatches, and letters I

was carrying for gentlemen in Mauritius were all broken open.”

However, the papers were returned. Cleveland accepted an offer of five thousand Spanish dollars for the *Caroline*, made by the British admiral. Soon afterwards the *Caroline* left for India with a naval lieutenant in command. She was never heard of again.

Cleveland visited the lookout station on the Lion’s Head summit, where a man signalled the approach of vessels with small brass cannon and flags. “The habitation of the signalman is so confined that his residence would be considered a cruel punishment were it not voluntary,” Cleveland said. “It is a mere dog-kennel, partly formed by the rock, barely sufficient to shelter one person in a sitting position from the weather. A slave brings him his daily

provisions and water. This is the only opportunity the recluse has for conversation during the day. My visit was a Godsend, and he begged me to repeat it.”

Sometime later Cleveland found himself in Calcutta, and there he bought a newly-built twenty-five ton cutter for five thousand rupees. He sailed this little ship to Mauritius with a cargo of oil, wax and ghee, and sold her there at a profit. At another period he owned a small English cutter, the *Dragon*, and sailed her far and wide in Eastern waters. Today the feats of Richard Cleveland would place him in the front rank of those who handle small craft successfully in deep waters. The voyages of his little cutters long ago have been overlooked by the historians of the sea.

How many people in South Africa remember Captain J. C. Voss, the Canadian who sailed the dug-out canoe *Tilikum* over the ocean? Voss was not a circumnavigator (though he could have circled the globe had he wished) and so he never gained such fame as the great Slocum of the same period. But the voyage of Captain Voss from British Columbia to England was a grand effort of seamanship; memorable, too, because of the interesting episodes which occurred while Voss was in South Africa.

It was in the summer of 1904 that a Cape Point lighthouse keeper looked over the eight hundred foot precipice at dawn and saw the schooner-rigged canoe with three masts sailing past. A visitor who was there suggested that it was a Venetian gondola which had put

to sea. In fact, the thirty-foot canoe had been hollowed out of a single red cedar tree trunk by Alaskan Indians. She drew only twenty-four inches of water aft. Instead of a bowsprit she had a weird Red Indian hand-carved figurehead. Yet there was room in this narrow-gutted craft for one hundred gallons of fresh water, provisions for three months, and Voss himself.

Voss had designed a sea anchor. He selected the frail *Tilikum* to show that a small craft could ride out any weather with this equipment. The original owner, a Red Indian, sold the canoe to Voss for a few pounds and a flask of whisky. Voss added a lead keel, sand ballast, decks, and masts carrying two hundred and thirty square feet of canvas. If anyone climbed a mast, *Tilikum* heeled over.

Voss took on a shipmate when he could find one. Unfortunately his first companion fell overboard in the Pacific, taking with him the only compass. Voss completed the run to Sydney with only the sun and stars to guide him.

He reached Durban just after Christmas in 1903 and was met by a tug. "Where are you from?" shouted the tug master.

"Victoria, British Columbia."

"By Jove, you have got a nerve."

"Absolutely necessary to get along in this world," Voss called back.

An old friend from Canada, living in Pretoria, suggested to Voss that he should rail the *Tilikum* to the Transvaal. This he did, and the *Tilikum* was exhibited at the

Wanderers Ground as "the first deep-sea vessel ever to visit Johannesburg".

Pretoria also saw the *Tilikum*, but the little ship met with an accident there while navigating on dry land. A horse took fright at the figurehead and kicked it off. General Louis Botha shook hands with Voss during this visit and remarked: "I would rather go through another South African War than cross the ocean in the *Tilikum*."

Voss transported the *Tilikum* down to East London by train, and continued his cruise to Algoa Bay. He arrived there just after a great gale, and found a small fleet of full-rigged sailing ships wrecked on the beach.

The little *Tilikum* was driven into Mossel Bay by one gale, and rode out another off Danger Point with her sea anchor. And so she came past Cape

Point at last with a light southerly wind helping her into Table Bay.

Voss told the reporters that a whale had risen suddenly, towered over him and almost overwhelmed the *Tilikum*. The canoe had also been pursued and stabbed by a swordfish. He had been followed by sharks for thousands of miles. "There was nearly always one on the leaside – I suppose it could see the man at the helm, and was tempted by the sight of meat so close to the water," recalled Voss calmly. But he said that his narrowest escape was when he had cramp in the stomach. No medicine gave him relief, and he thought it was appendicitis. In the end he took mustard and warm water, and that cured him.

His favourite medicine, however, was sea water. He cured himself of

seasickness with salt water, and took a small dose every morning.

Voss was a small man with a great appetite. He believed in regular meal hours in all weathers at sea; porridge and ham and eggs for breakfast; a stew of tinned meat, potatoes and onions for lunch; more stew for dinner; and a final meal of tea, hard tack and butter just before turning in.

Thousands paid to see the *Tilikum* in a circus tent in Cape Town. Here, too, Voss found a new shipmate, a man named Harrison who had suffered from tuberculosis and thought the voyage would do him good. So these two mariners sailed away, the *Tilikum* loaded with presents from well-wishers. Most of the parcels contained food: roast chicken, roast turkey, roast goose, wines, brandy and whisky.

They anchored off Robben Island for a feast.

Voss had intended to shape a course for Pernambuco without calling anywhere. However, poor Harrison was so seasick that Voss touched at St. Helena seventeen days after leaving Table Bay. Harrison had eaten practically nothing, and the salt water treatment had failed to cure him. He remained, thankfully, on the island when Voss sailed.

Tilikum made Pernambuco safely, then crossed the Atlantic again, ran up the Channel and ended her voyage at Margate. She had covered forty thousand miles in three years. Voss, it is sad to relate, died in 1922, at the age of sixty-four, as a poor 'bus driver. His exploits at sea had brought him neither fame nor fortune.

Chapter Twelve

OCEAN JABBERWOCKS

HEAVEN preserve me from a passage round the South African coast in a dredger. There was a time when I was eager to go voyaging in anything that would float. Those days are over. I have met fine old seamen who shuddered as they told me of their ordeals in dredgers.

Suction dredgers are not so bad, for they are equipped like vacuum cleaners with no top-hamper to worry their crews. But the queer old-fashioned bucket-dredgers, with their split hulls and weight aloft, were meant to work only in calm waters. When they went to sea, each voyage was a nightmare. No wonder so many of them foundered in heavy weather.

A bucket dredger is a monstrosity, an ocean jabberwock with an ugly, shapeless hull, masses of exposed machinery and tall funnels. The endless chain of buckets works round a "ladder", which can be lowered to the depth required. The double hull has a deep well in the centre to allow the buckets to pass. But the double hull and top-hamper make the dredger a hard and sometimes dangerous craft to handle in a seaway.

I remember meeting the bucket dredger Sir Thomas Price years ago after a wild passage from East London to Table Bay. Her master was Captain H. S. Hodges; before that he had been mate of the famous little Irish yacht *Saoirse* in which Conor O'Brien sailed round the world.

They lowered the buckets for the passage and put four hundred tons of

ballast into her. Drenched by rain squalls at the start, they ran into a south-easterly gale on the first night at sea. "Lord, how she rolled!" said Hodges. "Often I thought she was going to roll right over. And there was a lighter in tow, with five men aboard. How we pitied them!"

They steamed round Agulhas with the full force of Kipling's "dread Agulhas roll" on the beam. She had no bulwarks and every sea swept her decks. Then, off Danger Point, the twelve-inch coir tow rope to the lighter parted.

"It snapped like string," Hodges told me. "I ordered all hands on deck to get another line ready and manoeuvred the dredger to windward of the lighter to pass the line. That attempt failed, so we rolled down to leeward, battered by the seas, and let the lighter drift

towards us. This time the five men on the lighter managed to catch the line and secure it. After that episode I slowed down to half-speed. But it is no joke, going ahead in heavy weather with the seas pounding into the gap in the bows and thumping against the hull so that you keep wondering whether the rivets and bulkhead will hold. On arrival I compared notes with the men on board the lighter. I thought that they had felt the worst of it, for the lighter was thrown about like a scrap of driftwood. But the five men told me that they had never imagined that any ship could roll as the dredger did without capsizing."

One old bucket dredger, the *Delver*, steamed to Table Bay from Glasgow in 1912 and lasted until 1957, when she became a target for South African Air Force rocket-firing Vampire jets.

During her long harbour career the *Delver* brought up some quaint old glass bottles, cannon balls, crockery and a few coins. But it was not so romantic when she fouled her buckets with old wire hawsers. Once she nearly sank herself by hauling up an ancient anchor which almost penetrated her hull. One of her masters had previously committed suicide, and it was said that the ship had tried to follow his example.

A veteran indeed was the suction dredger *Sir Gordon*, named after the premier of the Cape Colony, Sir Gordon Sprigg, when she arrived. That was in 1890, and she remained at work for fifty-five years. Her first task was to open up the port of East London. Later on she became a rock breaker; then a grab dredger cleaning up alongside the wharves. After the great

flood of nearly forty years ago she cleared the Buffalo River mouth when it was completely blocked with tree trunks and the carcasses of cattle. She was sold to a treasure syndicate, but failed to bring up any treasure. Her end came in 1945, when she was scuttled off Durban.

Early this century three dredgers which had finished dredging Durban harbour were sold to the Geelong Harbour Board. They steamed off to Australia at intervals, and the first, the *Peter Paterson*, arrived safely. The second, called the *Walrus*, shared the fate of the *Waratah*, for she was never heard of again. This is the story of the third dredger, the *Octopus*.

It was on October the thirteenth 1906 (note the date) that the *Octopus* sailed. The *Walrus* had sailed on the thir-

teenth of the previous month. Few ships carried wireless in those days and it was not realised that the *Walrus* was missing.

Early on the morning of October the fourteenth a carrier pigeon returned to the loft of Mr. Chick of Umgeni bearing a message addressed to the port captain:

“Leaking badly. Water in lower fire. Anticipated to abandon last night. Still in her. Approaching coast north of Durban. In distress. If tug does not come I may still have to leave her. If tug comes up five miles off land he will see us. One man, J. Stirling, missing this morning. No one knows when he was lost. Leaking badly and will likely lose her if out tonight.

Thomas Ogilvie,
Master, Dredger Octopus.”

Captain Ogilvie had his wife and two babies in arms with him. No doubt he thought it would be safe for them to travel in a steam dredger of one thousand tons, for Lloyd’s surveyor had passed her as seaworthy. He should have known better, for she was overloaded with eight hundred tons of coal for the long ocean crossing. She was low in the water and she laboured heavily from the start.

Designed as a suction dredger with hopper doors, purely for harbour work, the Octopus had room in her bunkers for only three to four days’ coal. Ogilvie intended to make the run across the Indian Ocean to Fremantle without calling anywhere – hence the enormous load of coal, with one hundred and fifty tons on deck. This left the unhappy Octopus with a freeboard of only two feet amidships.

Another hazard to be faced by this type of dredger on ocean passages lies in the hopper doors. A hold is filled with the dredged material, the ship goes outside the harbour, opens the hopper doors like trap doors, and dumps the load. On an ocean passage the hopper doors must be made perfectly watertight, as the holds are needed for coal.

More than two thousand pounds had been spent on repairing the Octopus on this occasion and fitting her out for open sea. But the precautions which looked so satisfactory in dock began to fail soon after departure. The Octopus put to sea in a fresh gale, steering north-east. At six that evening the chief engineer went to the bridge and reported that the ship was leaking. He said the leak was in the hopper. It had been caused by the straining of the

heavily-loaded dredger, and he was having difficulty in dealing with it because the pumps were choked with coal and cinders. "The engineers are working up to their necks in water, trying to clear the pumps," added the chief grimly.

It was a nasty moment for Captain Ogilvie. He had his wife and children on his mind. Another woman, a Mrs. Walters had been signed on as "stewardess", for dredgers are not allowed to carry passengers. There was a crew of eighteen. And at this stage, to make the situation worse, two frightened stowaways appeared on deck. They were put to work with the crew heaving sacks of coal overboard.

It was no use. The ship was going down steadily by the head and the water was creeping up to the fires. Captain Ogilvie gave his men whisky

with their bully beef, but still the water gained on them. In the morning Stirling was sent forward to fetch some fresh water, but he never returned. Ogilvie turned the ship with difficulty, as the steam was low, and tried to run back to Durban. Then he decided that he would never make port in the sinking Octopus and gave the order to abandon ship. It was eleven o'clock. The decks were awash and it seemed that the Octopus was about to founder.

They all got away in two boats. The captain took the starboard boat with the women and children and twelve others; and when the other smaller boat had been launched by the seven remaining men he took it in tow, made sail, and steered for the coast.

Meanwhile the pigeon message had been received, and the tug *Sir John*

steamed out and northwards to the rescue. She was sighted by Captain Ogilvie, but failed to see the boats and went on towards St. Lucia Bay. The lifeboats separated and headed in towards the surf, bent on landing.

The smaller boat with seven seamen on board turned in for the beach and capsized in the surf. All the men had lifejackets, however, and all reached the shore, bleeding but safe. They walked several miles to the Blackburn Hotel and then took the train to Durban from Mount Edgecombe station.

Captain Ogilvie chose a different beach for landing. His boat struck a sunken rock, swung broadside on to the surf and went over. His wife and children were swept away and drowned before his eyes. Mrs. Walters was helped by the seamen, and she

and all the others came safely to the beach. They had landed one mile to the north of the Umhlanga River, close to the home of the Hon. Marshall Campbell. There they found shelter.

Not long afterwards the *Octopus* drifted ashore, grounding to the north of the Tongaat River. Rusty fragments of the wreck remain to this day.

I looked up the court of inquiry proceedings and found to my surprise that the bereaved master was found guilty of a grave error of judgment in abandoning ship. The court held that the ship would have floated and could have been saved if she had not drifted ashore. Captain Ogilvie was also blamed for trying to beach his lifeboat at the place where his wife and babies were drowned.

Durban raised a fund of fifty-two pounds to supply clothes and food for the crew of the *Octopus* at the Seaman's Institute. The Geelong Harbour Board was awarded a total of thirty-two thousand pounds in insurance for the two dredgers, the *Walrus* and the *Octopus*. Poor Captain Ogilvie lost his whole family and his job.

I shall comment on this affair later. Listen to the queer tale of the bucket dredger *Cerne*, and you may form a better judgment. About three years after the Durban dredgers had been lost a twin screw bucket hopper dredger named *Cerne* finished her work at Simonstown dockyard. She was a ship of over seven hundred tons, nearly two hundred feet long with the usual "well centre". Her speed was eight knots provided the furnaces were

supplied with twelve tons of good coal a day.

Cerne had been built for service at Mauritius, and had gone out there under her own steam. She had also voyaged safely from Mauritius to Simon's Bay. Now, early in 1910, she lay in Table Bay Docks fitting out for the passage to the next harbour where she was to be employed. This happened to be Bermuda, across the Atlantic.

"She did not look the kind of ship one would like to cross the Atlantic in," wrote a master mariner in Cape Town at the time. "Not only are dredgers, as a class, nasty vessels in a seaway on account of low freeboard and want of depth, but a bucket dredger has a lot of top-hamper, much more than a suction dredger, and a bridge above that. The coal lowers the freeboard further."

Many people remembered the fate of the Durban dredgers, and so it was decided to place the *Cerne* in the hands of an expert named Captain J. A. Rogers. He had taken a small dredger from Scotland to Singapore, and had delivered a tiny tug from Liverpool to Buenos Aires. As a Royal Naval Reserve officer he had commanded torpedo boat destroyers. It seemed that the *Cerne* would be safe.

Of course the usual false bottom was fitted over the hopper doors. And, most unwisely, the usual heavy load of coal was piled everywhere, including the decks. It came out later that Captain Rogers had been ordered to avoid coaling at St. Helena, as coal cost sixty shillings a ton there.

There was trouble with the crew before sailing. Two engineers refused to go, and others were engaged.

Indeed, when Captain Rogers signed on his crew on January the sixth, the only man who had served in the ship before was the mate. Most of the hands were West Indian negroes who had been working as labourers at Table Bay Docks and were desperate to return home.

One day shortly before sailing the steward Deakin heard Captain Rogers exclaim: "Good gracious me, the ports are under water in harbour."

It was true. A seaman named John Smith tried to open the port over his bunk and found that it was below the waterline. He then made a point of looking at the Plimsoll mark, and noticed that the top line was five or six inches under water. When a tug passed the *Cerne* in dock, the wash passed over the dredger's decks and often the water found its way below.

Nevertheless, this floating coffin was passed as seaworthy and insured at Lloyd's. The difficulty about the Plimsoll was overcome by avoiding all mention of it in the ship's papers. The *Cerne* cleared for open sea and left Table Bay Docks on January the thirteenth. (For the third time I must ask you to note the date so that you may understand why seamen are superstitious.) She anchored in the lee of the breakwater until early next morning, for the *Cerne* was far from shipshape and there was much to be done.

When the *Cerne* steamed out past Robben Island she began to feel the south-easter. Then the wind veered to south-west, the sea rose, and the lurching jabberwock listed to port. Captain Rogers put all hands on to shifting the deck load of coal to star-

board to counteract the list. He was successful. Soon afterwards, however, the engineers reported that the ship was leaking and that the pumps could not deal with the leak.

By this time the *Cerne* was off Dassen Island. Rogers decided to return to Table Bay Docks for repairs. His steering gear failed as he turned, the ship was swept from end to end, and at three in the afternoon Rogers had to hoist his red ensign upside down as a distress signal.

Fortunately the German cargo steamer *Schliesen* was passing. She sent a hawser aboard the *Cerne*, but it broke twice. When the dredger was drifting near the rocks of Dassen Island all hands abandoned her and were brought to Table Bay in the *Schliesen*. The tug *Sir Charles Elliott* went out in

the hope of salving the *Cerne*, but the dredger had foundered.

Captain Rogers told the court of inquiry that the strain due to rolling must have opened up a seam. "A ship in seaworthy condition would have stood that strain, would she not?" he was asked.

"I thought she would, but she did not," Rogers replied. "I have taken smaller vessels loaded with coal across the oceans safely. This is my first accident."

Captain Leigh, the port captain, said in evidence that he had no control over an overloaded, badly-equipped or unseaworthy vessel leaving Table Bay Docks.

The court exonerated Captain Rogers, and declared that the *Cerne* was well-found and seaworthy when she left.

The leak in the port side was caused by straining in a heavy sea. The captain was justified in abandoning ship.

I think that Captain Rogers was lucky in comparison with poor Captain Ogilvie of the *Octopus*. All three losses, the *Walrus*, the *Octopus* and the *Cerne*, were really due to the casual attitude towards safety at sea half a century ago. This was the period, you will remember, when the *Titanic* was allowed to sail without sufficient lifeboats. Ships were regarded as unsinkable. If anything went wrong, the master was usually blamed; and the master dared not complain about an unseaworthy ship for fear of losing his job.

All three dredgers sailed on the thirteenth of the month. But it was no mysterious force which sank them. It

was human stupidity in allowing those cranky little ships to put to sea overloaded with coal.

Dredgers shoot their spoil into steel hopper barges. Old hands at Table Bay Docks still remember two famous hopper barges known as 407 and 408. Thanks to a whim on the part of some eccentric and forgotten South African port official, those two barges sailed all the way from Scotland to the Cape. Their voyages were probably unique, in the true sense of the word.

It was in 1912 that the two barges were completed at Paisley. Their hopper doors were sealed in the manner which I have already described, the decks were covered in and made watertight, and two masts were fitted. They had no engines of course, but the ungainly craft were

rigged as schooners. Swedish bricks were carried as ballast, and these were used in the construction of the present port office at Table Bay Docks.

The hoppers could have been carried on the deck of a freighter, and that would be the procedure nowadays. But this was 1912, when real seamen were still to be found; men willing to endure long passages under hard conditions for a few pounds a month. They must have been real seamen, for each barge was deemed to be properly manned with a crew of master, mate and three able seamen. Very soon they proved their seamanship.

Barge 408 was the first to arrive in Table Bay after a passage of seven months! Captain Brown hurried on shore. Mr. Anderson the mate spoke to the reporters. He had been at sea for fifty-two years, he said, but this was

the first time he had sailed in a steel box masquerading as a schooner.

“First there was a gale, the steering gear carried away, and we had to ship a tiller,” declared the mate. “It took the combined strength of all hands to steer with the tiller, so we put into Queenstown for repairs.

“Then we had light winds and we were so long at sea that food ran short. We put into Bahia in Brazil and had a good meal. During the second half of the passage we were becalmed for forty-two days in the Gulf of Guinea. We might have starved, only there were flying fish jumping over us in millions. We also caught and ate albatross, dolphin, skipjack and bonito.”

Barge 408 had a top speed of five knots. She would have sailed better if lee-boards had been fitted, to grip the

water like a yacht's centre-board; but such luxuries had not been provided. Barge 408 (and her sister) made a couple of knots sideways for every knot they moved forward.

Barge 407, sailed by Captain Ross, had a more adventurous story to tell on arrival. She battled her way across the Bay of Biscay with decks leaking and bunks and clothes wet. Then she laboured down through the westerlies and into the north-east trades. Near the equator they drifted a mile or two a day, catching sharks for sport. One day they hooked nearly fifty sharks.

For ten weeks they drifted in light, baffling winds. Just after crossing the equator their provisions were almost exhausted. The coal they used for cooking was all gone. They had to break up the hatch covers to boil the last of their salt meat. Then they made

Pernambuco, and all hands aboard Barge 407 had a square meal. Little did they know that Barge 408 had been in a similar predicament.

It was easy sailing down to the latitude of Tristan da Cunha, but then the wind freshened into a snorter from the north. Barge 407 encountered heavy seas. The man at the wheel was never dry. Gear was always carrying away.

Christmas 1912 was spent at sea without tobacco and with little food or water. Captain Ross put all hands on a water ration of half a pint a day with half a pint for the cook. After a week of this hardship the barge made her South African landfall on the lonely coast to the north of St. Helena Bay. And there she anchored, on a lee shore. Captain Ross knew he was risking his ship, but the danger of thirst was greater.

Heavy surf was breaking on the shore. Four thirsty men volunteered to land in a dinghy and fetch water. They were overturned in the surf, but saved the dinghy and oars and set off inland to find a farm.

Three hours, and they came to a farm where no one spoke English. They drank the brack water greedily and marched on for another two hours to the next farm. There they enjoyed a meal of brown bread, butter, eggs and milk. The farmer directed them to a settlement with a post office. So they reached St. Helena Bay at last and sent an urgent telegram to the port captain, Table Bay Docks, asking for a tug. They had covered thirty-five miles through bush and sand under the January sun. Their clothes were torn and their feet were sore, but they knew that help would soon be on the way.

Next day a fishing cutter carried them back to Barge 407. She was straining at her cable not far from the shore, but she was still there. When the tug *Manila* reached them she put on board not only a tow-rope but food, water and tobacco. Barge 407 came to Table Bay Docks at last, two days after Barge 408, and seven months after leaving Scotland.-

Perhaps it is just as well that hopper barges are no longer sent across the oceans. Dredgers have to do it, but you know now why you will not find me on board one of them.

Chapter Thirteen

RUSSIAN ARMADA OFF THE CAPE

SIGNALMAN Harvey called his wife and gave her the telescope. It was the most dramatic scene he had ever known during his years in charge of the look-out station on Signal Hill. "Russians all right sixteen of 'em," he announced. "No good calling them up, though. They must be thirty miles offshore."

For days everyone from Cape Town to Cape Point had been awaiting news of the Russian fleet. An incident early in the voyage had almost led to war between Britain and Russia; and it seemed possible that the incident might be repeated when the blundering Russians entered South African waters. Night after night the Simonstown batteries had been manned at full strength. Even in far

away Natal fifty mounted police troopers had been sent to the coast to stand by the obsolete guns on the Bluff and Durban beach.

It was 1904, and Tsarist Russia was at war with little, unknown Japan. The Japanese, who had only recently emerged from medieval ways, had been winning battle after battle on land and sea in the Far East. So the Russians had assembled a great fleet in the Baltic to steam across the world and vanquish their enemies.

It was a mighty fleet on paper. Manned by better seamen, it might have been a powerful fleet. But the Russians were doomed from the moment their Tsar gave his approval.

Russian naval officers of that period sought comfortable shore billets rather than sea experience. They preferred

vodka and pink champagne, graft and bribery, to gunnery and manoeuvres. Among them were counts and princes; cruel, self-indulgent and inefficient. They knocked their men down and ordered floggings without allowing the victims to speak in their own defence. They wore uniform arrogantly at all times; on shore and afloat, usually with dirty collars. They smoked their little Russian cigarettes at all times, on and off duty. The ratings, many of them recruited far inland and poorly trained, were stupid mujiks. Sometimes they were mutinous.

Such was the personnel of the fleet which was sent out under the elderly Admiral Rozhdestvensky to meet those patriotic fanatics, the Japanese. Rozhdestvensky had forty ships and twelve thousand men; but he had to steam eighteen thousand miles and he

needed half a million tons of coal for the voyage. Only the Russians could have planned such a fiasco.

Only the nervous Russians could have mistaken trawlers in the North Sea for Japanese torpedo boats. In the confusion that night they sank a British trawler and killed two British fishermen. They also opened fire on each other and killed a Russian priest. Britain sent an ultimatum to Russia.

Although the incident was settled when the Russians paid full compensation, some uneasiness remained. King Edward VII wrote to his Foreign Secretary: "I really think that we see daylight, and what has been a most grave and serious incident may pass away quietly, and perhaps we may be on a better footing with Russia later. They must, however, see that the world cannot tolerate their fleet

opening fire on any ship they meet that comes within reasonable distance.”

Rozhestvensky had been warned during the voyage that he would encounter fishing vessels in South African waters, and that any repetition of the North Sea incident would be “highly undesirable”. He was inclined to be truculent. Russian agents had informed him that a flotilla of schooners, armed with torpedo tubes and disguised as fishing craft, were awaiting him at Durban. It was said that Rear Admiral Sionogu of the Japanese Navy was in charge of this secret mission. So Rozhestvensky replied that any fishing vessel which approached or tried to break through his squadron would be ruthlessly destroyed. Hence the suspense in Cape Town as the Russians moved southwards.

It was a slow progress. The queerly-assorted Russian fleet was led by the eighteen-knot flagship *Kniaz Suvarof*, a heavily armoured battleship of fifteen thousand tons with three sisters, *Borodino*, *Alexander III* and *Oryol*. They were painted black, like most Russian warships, with yellow funnels. They had twelve-inch guns and rams. But other ships were less impressive. The old battleship *Oslyabya* seemed to be top-heavy. Another ship, *Dimitri Donskoy*, had been a square-rigged frigate; now, with engines that gave her only ten knots, she was on her way to a naval battle.

One vessel named *Kamchatka* was purely a repair ship, and it was not long before the naval ratings and civilian engineers on board came to blows. Another ship was filled by a

plant which provided drinking water from the sea. A white hospital ship, the *Oryol* (not to be confused with the battleship) was regarded by the Russian seamen as a floating palace and haven of rest. Thousands of men longed to be taken ill and transferred to her. Morale was low in the doomed fleet of Admiral Rozhdestvensky. Rozhdestvensky had many nightmares, but coal loomed even larger in his mind at first than the Japanese enemy. His ships needed ten thousand tons of coal a day. He could not expect help in any British or Portuguese colonial port, but the Germans were friendly and the French were observing a sort of benevolent neutrality. Sixty colliers and storeships of a German line had been chartered. Early in November 1904, Rozhdestvensky met them at

Tangier, his first African port. There he decided to split up his fleet.

His reasons were obscure, but it is possible that he feared some of his ancient ironclads might capsize off the Cape if they ran into heavy weather. All the ships were overloaded. Many of them carried too great a weight of armour above the waterline. In some the stability had been affected by unnecessary top-hamper in the shape of amenities for officers. It was a Russian naval tradition that officers should live in luxury. Rozhdestvensky had ordered the officers to stow coal in every corner, including their own cabins; but the top-hamper remained.

Food was another problem. Strange to say, this grim and inefficient navy fed its men fairly well. Peter the Great had hanged three pursers for serving bad food. Now the men expected liberal

rations of tea, meat and vegetable stew, and a quarter of a pint of vodka a day. Every ship was stacked with barrels of salt meat, biscuit and cases of vodka. With all this cargo, the Russian fleet steamed with lower decks almost awash.

So only the most seaworthy ships came by the Cape route. They were the up-to-date flagship and her sister battleships, the older *Oslyabya*, the odd but seaworthy old *Dimitri Donskoy*, the cruisers *Admiral Nakhimoff* and *Aurora*, transports, store ships and colliers and the hospital ship. All the rest went through Suez to meet their admiral at a Madagascar port.

It was slow, as I have said, and the Russians soon felt the heat of the tropics. While they coaled at Dakar an officer dropped dead. Mutiny after

mutiny was reported by harassed captains. Rozhestvensky signalled threats all round the suffering fleet, and some he carried out.

He had two nieces among the high-born nursing staff in the hospital ship. One night an unexpected searchlight revealed a boat from the *Dimitri Donskoy* with a lieutenant, two midshipmen and a nurse in it, returning to the hospital ship after a party in the old frigate. According to a French newspaper, the admiral placed the three officers in an open boat with food and water and ordered them to row back to Russia for court-martial. In a circular the admiral referred to the "example of profound depravity" set by these officers, and declared that everyone might reap the consequences.

They coaled again at the French port of Libreville in equatorial Africa. Owing to faulty navigation they crossed the equator more than once trying to find the place. When the admiral landed at this wild spot, French officials told him that cannibals had eaten two white men shortly before his arrival. However, the seamen bought monkeys and parrots, and all hands enjoyed the pineapples, bananas and mangoes. Some of the captains wished the divers to examine the hulls of their ships for defects, but there were too many sharks about.

Great Fish Bay was the next coaling port. This is a huge sandspit harbour in Angola, the last Portuguese desert outpost before South West Africa is reached. Of course the Russians had no right to be there, but they knew the

bay was inhabited only by fishermen. However, the Portuguese gunboat *Limpopo* (with one small gun) greeted them and asked them to leave. Rozhestvensky sent an insulting reply. The *Limpopo* steamed away to carry the news to the Governor-General, and Rozhestvensky delivered his final message: "Good-bye, little one. Pleasant passage. By the time you have crawled to the Royal Navy for help, not one of us will be here."

Then came Luderitz, a cheerless, open roadstead but a port where the small German population welcomed the Russians. A gale blew up soon after the fleet arrived. After a delay the coaling started; but warships and colliers were damaged as they rolled heavily side by side. "Men are going out of their minds in the fleet," wrote Chief Engineer Eugene Politovsky to

his wife. "It is impossible to sleep as the rats have greatly increased. Some of the ships have lost their anchors. The divers fear sharks, but they have to go down all the same."

At last the coaling was finished. A sub-lieutenant in the battleship *Oryol* had gone mad, racing about the decks shouting: "The Japs are waiting for us. We shall all be sunk." But the hospital ship had gone on to Cape Town (where she was admitted under the Red Cross flag) and the demented officer had to be locked in his cabin.

"Happy voyage and all success in your venture," signalled the German commanding officer at Luderitz as the Russians rolled away to sea again.

Thus the first sight Cape Town had of the Russians was the handsome white hospital ship *Oryol*. There had been

incidents however, before this arrival. Early that year the British freighter *Beckenham* had left London filled with cordite for Japan, and it was thought that the Russians might try to intercept her somewhere in African waters. But the *Beckenham* had kept well away from the ordinary steamer tracks, and had reached Japan after sixty-nine days at sea without calling anywhere or sighting another ship. Two Russian ships prowled along the South African coast after that in the hope of seizing ships laden with contraband. They were the *Smolensk* and the *Peterburg*, armed merchant cruisers. In August the *Smolensk* had stopped the British freighter *Comedian* near East London, but had allowed her to proceed to Durban after a search. British men-o'-war then set out in search of the

Russians, finding both of them at Zanzibar.

Now the Russians had become visible to everyone and all Cape Town stood on the South Arm and stared at the *Oryol* with her clipper bow, band of red along the bulwarks and red cross emblems on her funnels. She reminded many people of the Union-Castle mail boat Scot, and indeed she had been a British passenger liner before her conversion.

A launch flying the White Ensign paid a courtesy visit to the *Oryol* while she was lying in Table Bay. Soon the ship came alongside the old Loch Jetty for water and fresh food. Privileged visitors were allowed on board. Mr. Knight, a shipping agent who also acted as Russian Consul, arranged with Captain Laklimatoff for reporters

to inspect the ship. Everyone was courteous, but few spoke English.

However, the reporters were shown the launches which were intended to dash among sinking ships in battle and pick up the wounded. The operating theatre on the boat deck had four tables. The hospital staff of eighty included a French Red Cross surgeon and twenty Russian sisters. They wore brown or grey uniforms with the red cross on their aprons. Patients lay in hammocks on the upper deck; they were mainly seamen injured in coaling accidents.

Mr. O. Hansen, a shipping clerk on duty while the *Oryol* took on stores, told me that the Russians were extremely worried about Japanese secret agents. One of the Cape coloured labourers had Mongolian features, and he became a marked man as soon

as he stepped on board. "A Russian officer, with signs and gestures, made it clear to me that this man would have to be removed," Mr. Hansen said. "I found that the officer spoke German, and explained to him in this language that the labourer was harmless. He accepted my word, but I could see the Russians watching that coloured man's every movement until the ship left the docks."

One day the Russian officers went on shore in a body and sat down to a gay lunch at the Metropole Hotel in Long Street. Then on December 19, the Tsar's "Name Day," there was a party in the hospital ship and she was dressed with flags.

Baron Ostensacken, the officer in charge of supplies, told the reporters that the hospital ship carried enough medical stores and food for a year. She

took on additional medical comforts during her stay. But the item which caused wide comment – even in the newspapers – was the amount of alcohol ordered from Cape Town firms. Not only did the ship take on many cases of wines and spirits; the officers, and individual nursing sisters, also placed huge orders. No doubt they needed it before the interminable voyage ended.

Meanwhile the naval and military authorities at the Cape prepared for a Russian "invasion". Ships in Cape waters were advised to show clear lights. It was rumoured that the Russian fleet would call at Simons-town for food and water, though under the rules of war they would not be permitted to remain in harbour for more than twenty-four hours.

The *Cape Times* remarked: "Under the iron rules of neutrality we cannot do much to help the squadron on its way. We will nevertheless regard it with the sentiment which common humanity inspires towards a band of men who have embarked upon a voyage of so much hazard. The adventure is one of which no one can see the end; but if the matter is brought to the issue of battle, it is certain that at least some of the proud ships which are now passing along our coasts will never return."

Some uneasiness was caused by the fact that the British naval force in Simon's Bay consisted of just two ships, the flagship H.M.S. *Crescent* and the small gunboat *Thistle*. Three other gunboats were lying at moorings out of commission. It was announced, however, that a large body of police (about one hundred and fifty men) had

been drafted to Simonstown to prevent "disgraceful scenes". The behaviour of Russian seamen on shore was notorious.

But if the Russians lost their heads again at sea and opened fire on innocent fishermen there was no great fleet to deal with them. The people of Simonstown found some comfort in the marching of the Royal Garrison Artillery gunners through the streets every night at eight. They manned the Upper North, Lower North, Noah's Ark and Craig's batteries, returning to their barracks every morning. One unhappy incident was reported. A marine sentry on duty at a magazine shot the sergeant of the guard through the leg. It seemed that the sergeant was creeping up to see if the sentry was asleep and failed to answer when challenged.

Probably the most ludicrous touch was provided by the Table Bay Harbour Board, which posted a notice on the Customs House at the foot of Ebenezer Road: "Owing to the approach of the Russian fleet, the s.s. *William Porter* is to be kept in perfect readiness day and night, with steam up. By order." The *William Porter* was an antiquated little tug with an oversize funnel. (Some time later she was towed up the west coast but capsized before reaching her destination.) No one ever explained the part which the *William Porter* was supposed to play.

As it happened, there was no need for the British flagship or the tug to intervene. Signalman Harvey and a few others watched the passing of the fleet on December 19 from Signal Hill. The Cape Point lighthouse

keepers sighted them and asked the nearest ships to "make their numbers". The request was ignored.

On board the Russian ships the rounding of the Cape was a great event. It coincided with the Tsar's "Name Day", which the hospital ship *Oryol* had celebrated in Table Bay Docks before hastening after the fleet. There were banquets in the wardrooms at sea, and vodka flowed on the mess decks.

Engineer Politovsky wrote to his wife that day: "If we double the Cape in safety, then thanks be to God. We are steaming near the shore. It is hilly, dark and treeless. Table Mountain is distinguished by its height and summit. The swell is tremendous. The ships are rolling. It is fearful to look at *Nachimoff* and *Donskoy*. Near Cape Town we met an enormous fourmasted

ship flying the American flag. She was coming towards us. We are expecting to meet three suspicious schooners.”

Another officer recorded sighting Table Mountain at eleven in the morning – “a glorious country which reminds one to an astonishing extent of the other end of the Old World, the North Cape”. He added that the cruisers were a pitiful sight off the Cape as they were nearly shaken to pieces, while the battleships dived deeply into the swell.

The fleet was running before a gale. It was just as well that wind and sea were astern, as some of the ships might have capsized if they had felt the weather on the beam.

Not long afterwards a sealed bottle was washed ashore on one of the Cape beaches, and the Cape Argus

published a translation of the letter it contained, written in Russian by one of Rozhdestvensky’s seamen: “Oh fisherman who may chance to find and read this letter, pray for those who are being sent to their death and pray that this terrible war may soon be brought to an end.”

Commenting on the letter, the Cape Argus said: “We hope the fleet will be recalled before it is too late. The ships are ill-found and the officers untrained. The whole world may well hope, for the sake of humanity, that this mournful armada may yet turn back ere it be too late.”

But the mournful armada did not turn back. A modern Trafalgar was fought in the Sea of Japan when the Russians steamed out of the fog and the Japanese fleet in formidable line ahead joined battle with them. Between the

hours of two p.m. on May 27, 1905 and the following midnight, the Russians had lost over thirty ships worth over thirty million pounds, while four thousand of their seamen were killed. The Japanese lost only three torpedo boats. Rozhdestvensky, seriously wounded, was taken prisoner. Russia had to sign a peace treaty and Japan became a great power.

Such was the drama Signalman Harvey and his wife glimpsed from Signal Hill that day late in 1904. They watched a turning point, and many of those at sea must have sensed the ultimate disaster.

Chapter Fourteen

THE FOOLISH HERO

AMONG the relics of my early childhood is a photograph which my parents bought when they took me for a voyage round Table Bay in the *Cape Girl*, an old wooden paddle-steamer. I cannot say that I remember her master and owner, Captain D. C. Wilbur, for this was in the summer of 1906, and I was six. Later that year I was told that the ship had been lost, and the captain with her.

That was in the days when some people regarded it as a noble gesture for a captain to refuse to leave his sinking ship. Fortunately this stupid tradition was not generally observed. For reasons best known to himself, however, Captain Wilbur decided to commit suicide in this way. It was a

queer episode, and only in recent years have I learnt the whole story.

The ship was originally named *John Paterson*, after a Cape M.L.A., who lost his life at sea in the eighteen-eighties. Built of teak in North Shields for the Cape Government, she arrived in Table Bay in 1883, and then went on to Algoa Bay to serve as a tug. She was a ship of about one hundred tons, ninety-two feet overall. For a decade she worked usefully in Algoa Bay, taking part in rescues in 1888 during the great south-east gale. Then she was transferred to Table Bay. In 1905 the harbour board decided to sell her.

Captain Wilbur, who had been a berthing master at Table Bay Docks, bought the tug for three hundred pounds. He was a thickset Irish Nova Scotian of forty with a wife and family in England. An excitable man on

shore, Wilbur was cool enough when handling his ship.

He added an upper-deck for passengers, all the way from stem to stern, and this gave the tug a top-heavy appearance. In fact, she resembled a Mississippi river boat in her new guise. The saloon was equipped with long divans, and tea was served to trippers in willow-pattern cups. (I believe a friend of the ill-fated captain still preserves some of those cups, given to her as souvenirs.) The tug was re-named *Cape Girl* at this period. She usually escorted the Union-Castle mail-boat out of dock, giving the passengers full value for their money. Wilbur was proud of her. She carried all his savings, and this may have influenced the ultimate tragedy.

The ancient engines of the *Cape Girl* were operated by levers from the

bridge, and they were so capricious that it was difficult to find an engineer who understood them or who was willing to go to sea with them. This handicap must also have played a part in the tragedy.

Winter came, and Captain Wilbur cast round for work to keep his little ship busy. He went into the fishing industry at Kalk Bay, towing open boats to Cape Point and taking a share in the catch. At this period the lumbering old sea-monster appears to have reverted to the name *John Paterson*, which fitted her better than the skittish *Cape Girl*.

Four boats which worked regularly with the paddle-wheeler were the *White Rose*, *Sea Star*, *Boela* and *St. James*. Manuel Venancio (nicknamed Viola), the Portuguese skipper of the *White Rose*, has been credited with the

“discovery” of the annual snoek, migration past Walvis Bay. I am not really digressing when I tell you a little about Venancio and his crew, for their stories were linked up with the *John Paterson* affair.

Venancio was sealing on the South West coast and islands when he noticed the snoek and helped to start the industry which has since become so important. Among his sealing crew was one Antonio Rodez, who filled two jam jars with bright stones. This was years before the diamond discoveries in South West Africa, and Rodez never guessed that his stones might be valuable. He was a superstitious man, and carried them everywhere with him, in his wooden box of fishing tackle, just for luck.

On the night of Thursday, June 14, Captain Wilbur towed the four boats

out of Kalk Bay harbour. There were nearly forty men, all told, under his command. They were due back the following night.

They did not return on the Friday. It was blowing hard from the west, and many anxious wives and children gathered at the fishing harbour. Two boats came in just before sunset on Saturday. They were Venancio's *White Rose* and the *St. James*. It was regarded as almost miraculous that the two open boats had crossed the bay safely in such heavy weather.

Venancio reported that the *John Paterson* had run out of food . and was short of coal. There were some who tried to persuade him not to put out again while the gale raged. Venancio, however, was a brave man and he was determined to help Wilbur. The two open boats, each carrying food, and



The paddle-wheel steamer John Paterson, when employed as a tug by the Table Bay harbour board early this century.

one and a half tons of coal, sailed back to Hangklip, where they had left the *John Paterson*. They could not find her. After scanning all the beaches they made Hermanus and hauled their boats on shore.

Meanwhile the *John Paterson* was drifting towards Danger Point in a heavy sea with the wind at gale force. Wilbur was unable to manoeuvre his ship owing to lack of coal. She bore down on the fishing boats Boela and Sea Star and sank them. Both crews boarded the *John Paterson*, making a total of thirty-four men on board. So they drifted out to sea, hungry and thirsty and in great danger. It was extremely cold. The *John Paterson* was leaking aft, but her steam pumps were out of action.

Some of the coloured fishermen became so desperate for food that

there was talk of killing a fat Malay named Matys Fabie. Often in later years Fabie described the terrifying spectacle of his comrades sharpening their knives for the feast.

Before dawn on Saturday morning the *John Paterson* was labouring in the heavy seas off Cape Hangklip when Wilbur sighted a steamer's lights. He made a distress signal with flags at sunrise. The steamer, which turned out to be the Bullard King liner *Umbilo*, altered course and came alongside. Captain Wilbur sent his dinghy over with a tow-line. The dinghy was swamped alongside the *Umbilo*, but the men clambered on board and towing started.

After three hours, however, the six-inch tow rope parted. All Saturday night the *Umbilo* stood by the stricken *Paterson*. Early on Sunday morning

Captain Robertson of the *Umbilo* lowered a lifeboat and took off the men on the *Paterson* – except Captain Wilbur. The lifeboat had to make two trips.

Wilbur shook hands with the last man to enter the lifeboat. He accepted food, water and tobacco sent across from the *Umbilo*, and waved farewell. There was no time to spare. That was the last anyone saw of the *John Paterson* and her obstinate master.

When the thirty-three survivors reached Table Bay Docks they said that they had broken up the top deck of the *Paterson* to feed the furnace, but that did not keep the engines going for long. She was almost foundering when they abandoned her.

A tug, the *Manila* was sent out at once by the Table Bay Harbour Board, and

H.M.S. *Terpsichore* joined in the search. Captain Davis of the *Manila* steamed as far as Danger Point, and he reported that the cranky old *Paterson* could never have come through the weather he had encountered.

Captain Robertson of the *Umbilo*, in his official report, declared: “The captain absolutely refused to leave, so he was left alone on board.”

Some days after the tragedy the Cape Argus published a letter from a reader suggesting that a further search should be made. It was pointed out that Captain Wilbur had been supplied with food and water, and that he had nearly three hundred lifebelts on board – relics of the days when the *Paterson* had been a pleasure steamer.” Captain Wilbur may have drifted off on a raft when his ship sank,” said the reader.

“The reality of the captain of the old wooden paddle tug *John Paterson* drifting southwards alone in his leaking, helpless craft, through stormy weather is as strange and sad as any picture painted for us by fictionists who deal with sea life,” declared the *Cape Argus* in a leading article. “It was foolish, but it was the foolishness of heroism.”

Antonio Rodez saved his diamonds from the disaster, though he died penniless and without ever realising that he had been carrying a fortune about with him for years. Children were playing with the *blinkklippies* in the street at Kalk Bay one day when someone who recognised them as diamonds offered the children five shillings for the lot. The children spent the money on sweets.

Manuel Venancio was living in retirement at Gordon’s Bay some years after World War II. Another survivor named Kaliel Williams was still fishing at Kalk Bay ten years ago at the age of seventy-five. I felt safe enough on board the old paddle wheeler in Table Bay, but I do not envy those starving men who had to abandon her and leave poor Wilbur to his fate that wintry morning off Hangklip.



Chapter Fifteen

SEA MYSTERIES IN WARTIME

EVERY war in African waters has left wakes of mystery, though much is revealed when peace comes again. Now and again, for reasons best known to themselves, often very good reasons, the authorities are evasive – or they decide to say nothing. I have always wondered what really happened at Cape Point lighthouse during the evening of July 24, 1916. This was the time when the German raider *Wolf* ran the British blockade successfully, rounded the Cape and

operated in the Indian and Pacific oceans, taking many ships and dislocating shipping services.

The two Cape Point lighthouse-keepers reported a visit from a party of men dressed in British naval uniform. There were two officers and several ratings. They carried boxes of apparatus which appeared to be for signalling, and an unidentified ship was seen off Cape Point. The officers wished to use the lighthouse telephone, and did so, calling up Simons-town dockyard. According to the lighthouse-keepers, their English was perfect, but the ratings never spoke a word. After the 'phone conversation the whole party returned to a boat waiting for them in Vasco da Gama Cove below the lighthouse, and they were seen pulling back to the ship.

It was rumoured in Cape Town that the visitors were Germans seeking information about the British naval forces in Cape waters. The waiting ship was said to have been the *Wolf*, or some other German raider in disguise, or a submarine.

The late Mr. G. H. Wilson (then assistant-editor of the Cape Times) was serving at that period as lance-corporal in a part-time defence unit. He heard the story while in camp at Cape Point shortly afterwards. When he reverted to civilian status after the Cape Point manoeuvres he asked the admiral whether he might use the story in his newspaper. The admiral objected strongly.

Mr. Wilson did not lose interest in this strange episode, and after World War I he again asked the admiral for an explanation. This time he received an

official letter in which the admiral confirmed that the lighthouse-keepers had reported the visit which has already been described. The admiral wrote: "Inquiries were at once made, and it was found that no British officers had visited the lighthouse, that no telephone call from Cape Point had been received at Simonstown, and that no men-o'-war were off Cape Point at the time. The closest investigation failed to reveal any explanation of this occurrence, and the only action taken was to enforce more rigidly certain precautionary measures which were organised in the event of a visit from an enemy submarine. No evidence has since come to light of an enemy submarine operating to the south of Monrovia, and it is more or less generally accepted that the supposed landing did not take place from a

submarine, and its object, if it did take place, cannot be surmised.”

So the lighthouse-keepers did receive a visit, and the visitors were not what they appeared to be. Not long ago a South African official who must have known the truth of that incident retired from the lighthouse service. I wrote and asked him to solve the mystery for me. There was no reply. So I would still be grateful to anyone who could tell me whether, in July 1916, the Germans landed at Cape Point.

One German spy at least was captured in Cape Town during World War I, though nothing was said about it at the time. Mr. H. R. P. Cochran, well known in later years as the senior immigration officer at Table Bay Docks, was the man who spotted the spy.

One of the British ships that Cochran boarded in the course of duty had a wireless operator with a foreign accent. The man claimed to be a Swiss. He had signed on in a South American port, and the captain was glad to have him because of the shortage of wireless operators.

Cochran was suspicious. He searched the operator's cabin and came across a small tin trunk. It was filled with oddments, and at the bottom was a picture of seamen with the name *Emden* on their cap ribbons. They were drinking beer with several Japanese beauties, and among the seamen was a familiar face above a foaming tankard-the “Swiss” wireless operator. He spent the rest of the war in the Maritzburg internment camp. Another queer, unrecorded episode of World War I was the attempt to escape

by sea made by a number of interned German *officers* in South West Africa. After the surrender General Louis Botha had allowed the officers to keep their arms. They had signed a parole form pledging themselves to refrain from taking any further part in the war.

Many officers were interned at Albrechtshöhe, an artillery depot on the Karibib-Windhoek railway line. Then they were allowed to stay at Swakopmund, a far more pleasant place. German civilians raised their hats as the officers marched along the duckboards of the sandy town with their swords and spurs. It was 1917. They still expected to win the war.

South African intelligence and police officers became aware that the Germans had their own sources of

news, though this was before the days of broadcasting. It is possible, of course, that someone had a hidden radio receiver, but the speedy circulation of the latest news puzzled the Union authorities because wireless ranges were limited except under very favourable conditions. Nevertheless, the Germans in Swakopmund seemed to know all about the operations of such German raiders as the *Moewe* and *Wolf*. Some of them believed that a powerful raider would land an armed party at Swakopmund one night and carry the German officers back to the Fatherland.

Every war creates its own types of wishful thinking. When the Germans finally realised that there would be no dramatic rescue they formed a plot to escape. They might possibly have succeeded if Mrs. Mason, wife of

Lieutenant F. M. Mason of the South African Police, had not noticed a German officer running a ruler over a boat on the beach. Sergeant Honeybun saw another German officer measuring the same boat on another occasion. Mason reported to Major Bult, the magistrate, and Colonel de Jager, officer commanding troops. Inquiries were made and a watch was kept.

The German officers had discovered an old surf boat half buried in the sand, and had carried it at night to a suitable place on the seafront. It was screened by old lighters and the pier. The surf boat was repaired by experts and all the necessary equipment was stored nearby – oars, rudder, mast and sails. In another shed the conspirators hid tins of meat, ship's biscuit, condensed milk, coffee and sugar, beer and brandy, and even a case of caviar.

They also had the arms which their easy-going conquerors had allowed them to keep – rifles, pistols, a few machineguns, and ammunition to match.

However, it was not the intention of the escapers to sail all the way back to Germany. They had learnt in some mysterious way that a small but suitable British ship was due to reach Walvis Bay on a certain date, loaded with provisions for the South African army of occupation. They intended to seize this ship, or any other ship they might encounter, hence the rifles and machine-guns. A German naval reservist was available to take command of the prize. They would then run the blockade and return to Germany. It sounded admirable if you chose to overlook the fact that these were officers on parole, enjoying great

freedom and the easiest conditions ever known among prisoner-of-war.

Mason had his men ready on the night of the attempt. In the faint moonlight they watched trolleys loaded with food and other supplies being pushed along the waterfront in the direction of the surfboat. Mason blew his whistle. Some of the escapers were arrested on the spot, others were rounded up in the town later. Mason and his men made a rich haul of guns, field-glasses, compasses, and certain luxuries which were shared out in the police station as legitimate loot.

Two civilians were tried and heavily fined for their part in the attempt to escape. Thirteen of the German officers were put on board an Australian troopship bound for Britain and taken to a much less pleasant internment camp than Swakopmund.

But that plot might have succeeded if only the methodical Germans had not taken their measurements in broad daylight.

Shortly before World War II the German battleship *Schleswig-Holstein* called at Table Bay. She was suspected of laying secret depots of food and munitions on the lonely islands of the Southern Ocean and Indian Ocean for the use of German submarines in wartime.

World War I did not leave the shipping in South African waters untouched, but it was a mild affair in comparison with the World War II losses. German submarines sank more than one hundred and thirty ships along the South African coast in two years. They came so close to Cape Town at night that one U-boat

commander photographed the lights of the city.

Many other wartime secrets have been revealed. It has been disclosed that two unidentified aircraft seen over Durban in 1942 were almost certainly Japanese from a large submarine in the neighbourhood. But one secret which will probably not appear in the official war history concerns the diamonds which were said to have been smuggled out of the North-West Cape to a German submarine waiting off the Namaqualand coast.

I cannot vouch for this story, and my informant does not wish his name to be mentioned. But I have known him for thirty years, and all his previous information has been accurate. I give it with all due reserve. Possibly you know that the Aughrabies waterfall on the Orange River is regarded by many

as a treasure chest of diamonds. The famous prospector Fred Cornell, I think, started the legend before World War I, when he tried to bring up diamonds from the deep pool below the falls.

The canyon is about six hundred feet deep, and only a level headed mountaineer can hope to descend safely, with or without ropes. For this reason there have not been many attempts to reach the diamonds which are said to lie in great pot-holes in the rocks, or at the bottom of the pool.

Perhaps it is true that the river which has yielded diamonds worth millions washed a great hoard downstream until they were trapped in the Aughrabies pool. At low water the pool is more than two hundred feet deep. Heavy buckets have been lowered into the pool again and again;

but there is no record of a diamond coming to the surface.

Aughrabies, the actual waterfall, is government property. I do not know whether a licence to dive for diamonds at Aughrabies or pump the pool dry would be granted. However, my friend in the North West Cape declares that diamonds were recovered there during the war years, when the Axis was in desperate need of industrial diamonds and willing to pay high prices.

My friend wrote to me: “The first pot-hole about ninety feet from the top of Aughrabies was entered in 1942 and valuable diamonds were removed. Some passed through Kenhardt for transfer to the enemy.”

The full story of enemy submarine activity along the South African coast has not yet been told, so that the truth

about the Aughrabies diamonds may still become known. At one period the South African Air Force organised a “civil” air service between Cape Town and Loanda to see what was going on along the coast of Angola. They located a fuel dump on a lonely beach. They saw no submarines. During the whole war there was only one claim to have destroyed a U-boat in South African waters.

I remain unconvinced in the matter of the Aughrabies diamonds. Once again I shall be grateful to anyone who can add to my scrap of knowledge on this fascinating subject.

Chapter Sixteen

MAN OVERBOARD

ONE day in 1926 the Union Castle freighter *Ripley Castle* steamed in from the United States. As a waterfront reporter I went on board hopefully to find out whether anything had happened during the long, hot run. "There's a trimmer named Tony Madison who might tell you a story," remarked the chief officer, Mr. John Crombie Brown.

Tony Madison, I found, was a thirty-five year old American of some education who had never worked at sea before signing on aboard the *Ripley Castle* in Philadelphia. In the tropics, he told me, the work in the stokehold became unbearable for a new hand. The "black gang" staggered about half-naked, almost blinded by the flames licking out of the glowing

furnace doors. Sweat ran hot on their necks and arms and trickled into their boots. Even the old hands cursed between the clanging of shovels and grinding of barrow-loads of coal from the bunkers.

It was like that one Sunday night just after the *Ripley Castle* had crossed the equator. The ship was steaming at ten knots with a gentle following breeze, which meant no air at all down below. Eight bells sounded midnight, and Tony Madison tumbled out of his bunk in the fo'c'stle, grabbed a piece of ship's biscuit, swigged a cup of water, and stumbled away over, the dark well deck, up the ladder, along the deck to the "fiddley" and down to the stokehold.

Ventilators and wind bags were useless that night. The firemen were roasted alive, but steam-pressure had

to be maintained, the relentless fires had to be fed. Cleaning the furnaces was agony, for when the red-hot coals came tumbling out they had to be sluiced with water, and that filled the stokehold with steam.

At last the strain became too great for Tony Madison. The leading fireman saw that he was fainting and ordered him up on deck for a breath of air so that he might recover his strength and carry on down below during the rest of the watch. Half dazed, with head swimming and eyes aching, Madison crawled up the steel ladder.

“I caught a glimpse of the stars – and then the sea closed over my head,” Madison told me. “It seems that in my half-conscious state I must have staggered to the side and slipped between the rails into the South Atlantic. As I came to the surface I heard a tremen-

dous noise of foaming water, and saw the creamy wash of the propeller only a few feet away. I cannot imagine why I was not sucked in and cut to pieces.”

The shock roused Madison and he shouted wildly. But the lights of the ship were moving steadily away, and he realised that there would be very few hands on deck in the small hours of the morning; just the look-out on the fo’c’stle and one or two men with the officer of the watch on the bridge.

Madison made up his mind that he would keep afloat until he was worn out. The water was warm enough. He struggled out of his boots and trousers and swam slowly in the wake of the ship. It was calm, with only a long swell moving the surface. Each time he came to the top of the swell he could see the lights of the *Ripley*

Castle moving steadily southwards. No one had heard him.

“I was almost certain that I was doomed, but I plodded along after the ship with a slow breast-stroke,” Madison went on. “One faint hope kept me going that I would be missed in the stokehold and that someone would search for me and raise the alarm. I did not see any visions of my past rising before me; that comes later, I believe, when you are half-drowned. As a matter of fact I did not do much thinking. I just concentrated on keeping in the wake of the ship so that if she did put back to look for me I would be there.”

Madison’s thoughts were beginning to wander when he was brought back to reality by a sharp pain in the hip, followed by a stab in the calf of the left leg. He grabbed at his calf, and his

hand closed over a large fish. The thought of sharks had occurred to him, and he felt relieved. Then he realised that a shoal of voracious fish might be dangerous, and he felt sorry that he had kicked off his trousers.

Seabirds fluttered down close to his head, and Madison thought they might try to pick his eyes out. He had not seen the lights of the ship for some time, but at that moment the swell lifted him and he saw them clearly. “That’s the last I shall ever see of the *Ripley Castle*,” he told himself. But he kept on swimming.

Meanwhile the end of the watch came on board the *Ripley Castle*, and one of the firemen pointed out that Madison had never returned to duty. By that time Madison had been in the water for forty-five minutes. When the report reached the captain, he swung

the ship round dead in her track and steamed back at full speed.

Madison never knew how they found him. He was growing exhausted and sleepy when suddenly he noticed something red – a steamer’s port light-right alongside him. He called, with the last of his strength, and saw a lifeboat being lowered. They dragged him over the side of the boat, and he went to sleep at once.

That was Madison’s tale, confirmed by Captain Sinclair, master of the *Ripley Castle*, and Mr. John Crombie Brown, chief officer. For years I remembered that story when other vivid tales, heard along the waterfront, had passed out of my mind. I never really understood how Tony Madison had been found, at night, in the wide South Atlantic, one and a half hours after falling overboard.

More than twenty years afterwards I went on board the mail ship *Pretoria Castle* to talk to Captain John Crombie Brown, commodore of the Union-Castle fleet and soon to retire from the sea. Captain Brown was known to his crews as “Eternity” Brown, for he held Bible classes in his cabin for all who cared to attend. I knew that Captain Brown had been round the world in sail and had served through two world wars. He must have had many escapes and adventures; but I was not prepared for the answer he gave me when I asked him to recall the most desperate episode of his sea career.

“It was that affair of Tony Madison,” declared Captain Brown. “I felt conscience-stricken about Madison. This is not the story you heard at the time – it is a much stranger story. You see, Madison had been to me the day

before he fell overboard and asked me how he could make his peace with God. I was thinking about my own problems at the time, and I told Madison to call later. When I heard he was missing I felt guilty. He would probably be drowned, and I had not told him.

“So I prayed that I might be given the chance of speaking to Madison again. I asked God to save Tony Madison from the sharks. Then I posted men all along the rails with orders to listen carefully for a shout.

“The ship came back to the position where Madison had gone overboard. I strained my ears and heard the faintest cry, so faint that I wondered whether I was imagining it. Fortunately another man had heard it, too. So I took charge of the lifeboat. As the men pulled away from the ship’s side I had to

make up my mind which way to steer. Where was the man? I believed that God would answer my prayer, and I steered at random into the darkness. There was dead silence as I shouted: ‘Madison ahoy!’ Then I shone my torch and saw Madison’s head close to the boat. We had him – after he had been in the water for ninety minutes. My prayer had been answered.”

You might not imagine that an episode such as the escape of Tony Madison could happen twice. It happened again in 1955 with a sixteen-year-old German cabin boy named Wolfgang Horst Emnich as the survivor. His chance was estimated at a million to one. His own ship steamed on for two hours without his absence being noticed, and *he was picked up by another ship.*

Wolfgang fell overboard in exactly the same way as Madison. He was making early morning coffee in the galley of the German tramp steamer *Stechelhoern* when he felt dizzy with heat. He went on deck to cool off, and next moment the ocean smacked him hard in the face. No one heard his shouts.

The *Stechelhoern* had left Las Palmas a few hours previously. She was forty-five miles south when Wolfgang fell overboard. Wolfgang kept his head, noted the course of the ship, then turned in the opposite direction and started the long swim back to Las Palmas.

"I felt lonely," he said. "The wind blew spray into my eyes. I choked when the sea filled my nose and mouth. But I managed to get rid of my boots, then my clothes, so that I was

swimming with nothing but my belt with my seaman's knife."

He needed that knife. First a jellyfish wrapped itself round his right arm and stung him painfully. With the aid of the knife he scraped it off. Then a shark circled round him. He could not see whether it was a man-eater or a harmless species, but when it brushed against him he plunged the knife into the shark's side. The shark made off, taking the knife. "I felt lonely again without my knife," said Wolfgang.

Salt water he had swallowed made him vomit. His arm, his eyes and his stomach-muscles were sore. But he kept on swimming, using the breast-stroke to save his strength, and taking his direction from the sun.

At eight thirty that morning the captain of the *Stechelhoern* was

informed that Wolfgang was missing. He turned back immediately and sent out a wireless request for a search to all ships in the neighbourhood. Captain Arthur of the *City of Lucknow* was not far from the position where, according to the German captain's estimate, Wolfgang had fallen overboard. Captain Arthur altered course and called for all available hands. Eight passengers helped.

Zigzagging again and again over a square of ocean, the *City of Lucknow* carried out the search, faithfully and efficiently, hour after hour. Wolfgang had been in the water for more than five hours when Captain Arthur decided to search an area two miles beyond the point given by the German captain. "I cannot explain what made me do it," declared Captain Arthur.

Cadet Cornes, staring with sun-puckered eyes across the great waters from the stern of the *City of Lucknow*, heard a seagull scream, and followed it down to sea level where a flock of seagulls flew round an object in the water. Was it food? A fragment of driftwood? Suddenly Cadet Cornes leapt to the bridge telephone. He had sighted Wolfgang.

A well-drilled crew took the lifeboat away in record time, with the second officer urging the men to row faster and faster. They were not going to lose him now. They did not lose him.

Wolfgang was found by the surgeon of the liner to be suffering from pneumonia, exposure and jellyfish stings. It was impossible to send him back to the *Stechelhoern*, and he remained in the liner's sick bay for days before he recovered. He owed his life to the fact

that he was a fine swimmer (winner of many contests); to the hovering sea-gulls; to the watchfulness of a young cadet; and to something more, a mysterious impulse felt by John Crombie Brown in the search for Tony Madison and Captain Arthur when he turned in a certain direction without knowing why he was doing it.

So Wolfgang Emrich landed in Cape Town and found himself, as an anticlimax, in the immigration detention barracks. It seems that if you are picked up miraculously at sea you still rank as a stowaway. That did not last long, and Wolfgang returned to Germany as a passenger. "It all sounds a story tall enough to arouse the envy of Munchausen," commented a Cape Town newspaper. "Yet it happened. We wonder whether any of our readers with a memory for amazing rescues

and freak escapes can recall any more surprising than the survival of Wolfgang Emrich."

Nearly thirty years had passed and they had all forgotten Tony Madison, the man who was picked up in total darkness as the answer to John Crombie Brown's prayer.

It happened a third time on the Cape run in April 1957, when an Italian seaman, Giovanni Sigona, jumped from the steamer *Northern Gulf* because his shipmates had made his life a misery. He was not trying to commit suicide. "I felt sure some other ship would find me," declared Giovanni Sigona

He was in the cold water one hundred miles west of Cape Town for thirty hours before a ship came along. Thoughtfully the Italian had provided

himself with two cork lifejackets and a copper bar to fight off sharks. He floated, numb with cold, until the tanker *British Premier* came along and rescued him. Giovanni Sigana recovered in a Cape Town nursing home.

These were all miracles indeed. Let me add a few points which may not be generally realized. In calm weather a ship can often follow her track in reverse by keeping to the “lane” of rubbish which marks her passage. Litter may remain afloat long enough to lead the way back to the person who has fallen overboard. Such a person may be sighted by a keen look-out with binoculars at a distance of four miles.

If you search the modern records of the sea you will find comparatively few people who have fallen overboard accidentally as did Tony Madison and

Wolfgang Emrich. It was different in the days of sail. But now any ship-master will tell you that the “man overboard” is usually attempting suicide. On rare occasions people are pushed overboard. Not long ago a senior Union-Castle captain stated that in forty years at sea he had never known one person to fall overboard by accident.

Chapter Seventeen

THE SHERARD OSBORN AFFAIR

TWICE in her long life the cable steamer *Sherard Osborn* appeared in the world's headlines. First when she hurried to the scene of the *Titanic* disaster and picked up the bodies of many victims. Again, a quarter of a century later, when she made her strange last voyage from Table Bay to Europe.

The newspapers never revealed the mystery of that voyage and the distress call which brought H.M.S. *Broke* to her side in the Bay of Biscay. Probably no one cared to do it while Captain Charles McClure was alive, but I can see no harm in explaining the whole remarkable episode now.

Captain McClure was a stocky, clean-shaven Tynesider who preferred

tweeds and plus-fours to uniform. I met him when he was running pleasure trips round Table Bay in the oak ketch *Chance*, formerly the well-known yacht *White Kitten*.⁶ McClure had gained a “square-rigged ticket” before going into steam. He had commanded minesweepers during World War I, and had earned an Italian decoration while serving in Mediterranean waters. After the war he had settled in Cape Town and taken part in business ventures – the *Chance* among them. It was in 1937 that he

⁶ Captain MaClure tried to organise a treasure-hunting expedition in the *Chance*, and advertised for partners willing to put up £6,500 for expenses. He proposed to raise sunken treasure at various points “between Cape Town and Dakar”, and the diver was also to examine rich banks of pearl oyster. He found it impossible to raise the £6,500.

was appointed master of the *Sherard Osborn*, 1,481 tons.

Now there was a ship with a past, one of the oldest steamers in the world still in commission. She was fifty-nine at that time. Launched on the Clyde as a cable ship, she became the favourite ship in the Eastern Telegraph service. They had given her a clipper bow, twin screws, fine teak deckhouses, and an old-fashioned binnacle supported by brass dolphins. She was one of those iron ships that never wore out. Her original boilers remained in use until the end, and she clung to her old, handsome decorations.

Early in her career the *Sherard Osborn* helped to lay the cables between South Africa and the Far East. She was used as a hospital ship during the East African campaign in World War I and then she was laid up in Knysna

harbour. A ship-owning family, the Thesens, intended to use her as a yacht for a world cruise; but finally they decided that a coal consumption of forty tons a day could not be tolerated. So the stately *Sherard Osborn* was turned into a floating fishmeal and crawfish canning factory, moored at Walvis Bay. This venture failed, and in 1930 she was laid up in Saldanha Bay. And there she lay until the market for scrap metal improved sufficiently to send the *Sherard Osborn* on her last voyage to the ship breakers.

She was towed to Table Bay from Saldanha, and the engineers worked for months on her ancient engines. Captain McClure and his family moved into the captain's quarters. At last the time came to find a crew.

It was said afterwards that the *Sherard Osborn* had a “scratch crew”, but that was not correct. Mrs McClure signed on as stewardess, for the ship had no passenger licence. There was one passage worker, W. Gore Graham, who received the nominal sum of one shilling a month and served in the engine-room.

Graham was a pleasant young man who came in for a good deal of publicity later, when he narrated the extraordinary story of the voyage. Educated at Harrow and Cambridge, he had travelled widely in Europe and reached Gibraltar just as H.M.S. *Rochester* was about to sail for the Cape. He joined her as a guest in the wardroom. Soon after arrival he took part in a Cape-Rand – Cape motor reliability trial. He spoke to the newspapers of an unhappy love affair;

but when I last saw him leaning over the side of the *Sherard Osborn* and wearing his last silk shirt he seemed a fairly contented adventurer.

Other members of the crew were more or less experienced seafarers – two certificated deck officers, two certificated and two uncertificated engineers, a bo’sun, six able seamen, three ordinary seamen, six firemen and four men in the catering department.

The ship was fully stored and provisioned for the voyage. Her engines were thoroughly tested. A certificate of seaworthiness was granted after careful examination by Lloyds surveyor.

And so the day came in July 1937 when old friends of the *Sherard Osborn* made a sentimental journey to Table Bay Docks to see the last of this

ship which had spent so many years in South African waters. She moved out slowly, blew her siren in farewell, and headed north for Walvis Bay. There she was to pick up a cargo of copra left by a vessel which had been on fire. Shortly before sailing there had been complaints from the fo'c'stle about a large hencoop which had been placed too close to the crew's quarters. This was moved aft. Mrs. McClure sat knitting placidly in the stern all through that difficult voyage.

Trouble first arose when the cook, an efficient worker, fell ill. Graham later described the state of affairs in these words: "It was found impossible to replace the cook by one man, and eventually three substitutes were found – one who could cook but could not bake, one who baked but could not cook, and a third man who acted as

butcher. After a lot of complaints the baker was made head cook. The butcher then fought and defeated the head cook, and was given the head cook's job. But I need hardly tell you that the food was far from satisfactory."

Affairs in the galley became so desperate that the captain himself sat in the galley peeling potatoes one night.

One of the men wrote from Walvis Bay: "There has been plenty of sport on board with the cooks and stewards. My word, the skipper has been shaking them up, and not without cause. One fellow has been de-rated from assistant steward to deck boy. 'It is hit or miss' as to the time the food will be ready, and when it is ready whether it can be eaten. We had our midday meal at three p.m., after the

captain had spent about three hours exhorting the men in the galley.”

However, the old ship steamed on after her Walvis call and reached Freetown, Sierra Leone, safely. There she coaled. There, Tod,’ the second engineer broke down, went to his cabin, and remained there for the rest of the voyage. Quarrels were frequent, but Mrs. McClure was always calm. Everyone on board remembered the way she knitted through the most violent arguments.

A letter posted by a member of the crew at Freetown and received in Cape Town contained this passage: “We have only been doing six and a half knots the last few days due to adverse currents. Of course the ship is never on an even keel, always having a list, and she always rolls, but one gets used to that. We are killing eighteen

chickens and seven sheep a week. It is a pity we have no decent cooks, for it is all spoilt, either burnt up or uncooked.”

Madeira was the last call, and the men complained to the British Consul that the fo’c’stle was uninhabitable owing to flooding. The grievance was remedied, and the unhappy *Sherard Osborn* steamed on into the Bay of Biscay towards Antwerp, her final port.

It was in the Bay that Captain McClure wrote out the wireless message that brought the *Sherard Osborn* on to the front page of so many eager newspapers. “Trouble aboard. Almost mutiny and sabotage,” ran part of the message. The full message has never been disclosed. Captain McClure handed it to his wireless operator at midnight. The

operator insisted on the captain signing it before he would send it out.

Next day the destroyer flotilla leader H.M.S. *Broke* came over the horizon at full speed and circled round the *Sherard Osborn*. The crew, knowing nothing of the captain's message, discussed this dramatic spectacle. They thought it had something to do with the Spanish Civil War, and regarded the destroyer as an escort.

Visual signals were exchanged for fifteen minutes. The *Broke* did not send a boarding party, as Captain McClure had assured the destroyer that he had the situation well in hand and was proceeding to Antwerp. The *Broke* then returned to Plymouth.

Every newspaper in London had its special correspondent on the quay when the sea-weary old *Sherard*

Osborn came alongside at Antwerp. One journalist had tried to board the ship at the mouth of the Scheldt that morning. He had spotted Captain McClure on the bridge wearing a grey trilby hat and lounge suit, while Mrs McClure, in a pink frock, was still knitting. And he had asked permission to come on board.

"Keep off! Keep off!" shouted McClure. "I don't care who you are. Go to blazes! You don't come aboard this ship, that's final." The crew winked and grinned, but the captain's attitude was truculent.

But there was no holding the newspapermen once the *Sherard Osborn* had docked. Members of the crew were staggered to hear of the "mutiny and sabotage" message, and could not explain it. Captain McClure remained silent.

An inquiry was held in London some time later, but by that time the newspapers had forgotten all about the *Sherard Osborn* and had passed on to other topics. I saw Captain McClure when he returned to Cape Town and asked him to clear up the mystery. He said the story was worth five hundred pounds. It was not worth that amount to me, or to the newspaper which employed me.

Nevertheless, I did find out why Captain McClure sent out his “mutiny and sabotage” message. He was a very worried man, and weeks of legitimate complaints about the food had preyed on his mind. Then one day in the Bay of Biscay an able seaman named Thomas Regan was steering and the compass card was swinging wildly. McClure sent Regan from the wheel and told an ordinary seaman to steer.

Then the idea formed in Captain McClure’s troubled mind that someone had tampered with the compass. He thought that magnets had been placed in the binnacle to cause the swinging; and though no magnets were found, the idea persisted. When the *Broke* arrived, McClure signalled: “I thought some devil had been at my compasses.”

It was all pure imagination, and the Board of Trade inquiry took a serious view of the wireless message which sent H.M.S. *Broke* on a wild goose chase. Captain McClure was reprimanded. Those who had manned the *Sherard Osborn* on her last voyage went to happier ships. And the least perturbed member of the ship’s company, Mrs. McClure, went on knitting.



Chapter Eighteen

MYSTERIES OF THE WHALES

ANYONE who goes out whaling will make the discovery that whaler men talk most of the time about whales. I do not suggest that these hard-bitten Norwegian seamen ignore entirely such old seafaring topics as wine (or aquavit) and women. Far from it. But in their mess rooms I also listened for hours to arguments about whales.

Only in recent years has mankind begun studying whales. The shooting goes on mercilessly, but the scientific investigation of whales and their habits has started. It is not easy to

observe the different species of whales, however, and so there are many mysteries to be solved.

I asked my Norwegian whaling friends to explain three mysteries which have puzzled me for years. First there is the Jonah story. "The Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights." Then there is the mystery of ambergris, a product of the sperm whale which defies analysis and of unknown origin. Finally there is the riddle of the false killer whales, those amazing oceanic creatures which appear to commit suicide by flinging themselves on shore. I have seen this myself, and perhaps it was the rarest spectacle I shall ever see. It was outside the experience of the Norwegians, but they had their own views on Jonah and the ambergris problem.

One of the skippers who took me out whaling from Saldanha was a man with a university education. He pointed out that the doubts about Jonah arose when it was found that the whalebone whales had very small gullets. But the sperm lives on the octopus (often of great size), and the skeleton of a shark sixteen feet long was once found inside a sperm.

Of course the Bible did not mention a whale at all, but a “great fish”. This may have been a translator’s error. But we know now that there are whales and great fish (in the shape of sharks) which are capable of taking a man in one gulp.

My friend put me on the track of a modern Jonah. The episode is supposed to have occurred in the South Atlantic, and if it is true then it must form one of the most sensational

sea adventures of all time. Among those who looked into the affair soon afterwards and accepted the story were Sir Francis Fox, a well-known engineer, Dr. Ambrose John Wilson, a former Fellow of Queen’s College, Oxford, and M. Henri de Parville, scientific editor of the *Journal des Debats*, Paris.

These men of standing had examined the log-book kept by the captain of the British sailing whaler *Star of the East* and affidavits made by various members of the crew, including a young harpooner named James Bartley. They described a whale hunt during February 1891, when two boats approached a large bull sperm whale. Bartley placed two harpoons firmly in the blubber and then the huge sperm upset one of the boats. When the other members of the crew had been

rescued, Bartley was missing. They killed the whale, however, and towed it back to the ship. Early next day the hands were cutting up the sperm when someone noticed a movement in the stomach.

According to the log-book, this was Bartley. More remarkable still was the statement that after he had been cut out and buckets of sea water had been thrown over him, he began to revive. He was demented for days, but gradually came to his senses. After three weeks he returned to duty.

Bartley made this statement on oath: "I remember being thrown into the sea. Then there was a fearful rushing sound. I was in complete darkness and felt that I was slipping along a smooth passage. Then I found that I had more room. I felt all round and touched a slimy substance everywhere. At last I

realised that I had been swallowed by the whale. I could breathe, but the heat was intense. It seemed to open up every pore in my body. Then I must have become unconscious as a result of the shock, and knew nothing until I found myself back on the deck of the ship."

Bartley had been bleached white by the action of the whale's gastric juices wherever there was no clothing to protect his body. His skin looked like parchment. Or so ran the account published in the *Journal des Debats* after M. de Parville had satisfied himself that the story was true.⁷

⁷ Recently I found another account of Bartley's adventure which stated that Bartley became blind as a result of his experience. He settled in his home town of Gloucester (England) and worked as a cobbler. Many doctors came to examine his peculiar skin

Sir John Bland-Sutton, the famous English surgeon who was President of the Royal College of Surgeons for several years, once gave an account of an American whaler man who was taken into the mouth of a sperm whale. The boat had been smashed, a very frequent occurrence, and one Marshall Jenkins went down with the harpooned whale as it sounded in its death agony. It came up for a last breath of air and vomited. Jenkins shot out with the remains of the last meal, and was rescued.

Dr. E. G. Boulenger of the London Zoo examined the evidence in a number of Jonah episodes very carefully and summed up in these

condition. His tombstone in Gloucester churchyard gives a short account of the affair, and describes him as "a modern Jonah". Bartley died in 1909.

words: "Many a fish story has weathered the cold incredulity of the scientist and the jeers of the man in the street. The biggest of all big fish stories, the story of Jonah, is still a matter for serious controversy. While one may reasonably question the prophet's survival after being swallowed, there is no shadow of doubt that certain whales could swallow a human being with the greatest ease. It is very evident that we need to learn more before rejecting the uncomfortable experience of Jonah as incredible. The physiological side of the story, however, presents many a moot point. How long, for instance, can a man stand a temperature of about 105 degrees Fahrenheit without water, even assuming that the air is fit to breathe? One can only say that James Bartley and Marshall Jenkins

had amazing luck to come through their ordeal.” Now for the ambergris, that fabulous flotsam, that rare and mysterious substance which has enriched seamen and beachcombers. You may find it anywhere, for the sperm circles the globe in search of food, and only the sperm secretes ambergris.

Large masses of ambergris have been found in African seas. It was a Dutch East India Company’s ship that picked up the largest known lump, weighing nearly one thousand pounds. But what is ambergris?

Do not believe anyone who tells you that this queer stuff of controversial origin is no longer valuable. The price fluctuates, and it has gone down as a result of clever laboratory substitutes. Nevertheless, there are still many perfume blenders whose secret recipes

demand genuine ambergris, the rich gift of the sea.

I spoke of ambergris as a mysterious substance because the naturalists have been unable to tell us how or why the sperm whale should produce this weird material.⁸ Chemists are unable to set down a satisfactory detailed analysis.

For many centuries the origin was a complete mystery. The ancients valued ambergris and used it as medicine and as incense in their temples; but they thought it came from the bed of the ocean, a sort of sea-mushroom torn up and set adrift by storms. Other wise old men declared that it was dropped

⁸ In 1959 I saw a fragment of ambergris exhibited in the British Museum of Natural History at South Kensington, and the notice stated clearly: “The mode of formation is still uncertain”.

by a huge and unknown bird. The sea bed theory persisted until early last century, though the secretive New England whaler men must have cut ambergris out of sperm whales before that.

Through the centuries this wonderful ambergris had many uses. Turks and Chinese, of course, paid high prices for ambergris as an aphrodisiac – which it certainly is not. Chinese called it *Lung sien hiang* or “dragon’s saliva perfume”, as it was said to be vomited out of the stomachs of sea dragons. (That was a fairly shrewd guess in those days.) Medieval doctors used ambergris as an ingredient in medicines designed to cure epilepsy, heart trouble, hydrophobia and rheumatism. A fairly recent medical work in my library still quotes ambergris for treating catarrh and

nervous disorders. Wealthy epicures ate ambergris; among them was King Charles II, whose favourite dish was egg and ambergris. Perhaps ambergris still appears on some oriental menus, in the sweetmeats and sherbet of Persia and the coffee of rich Arabs. Wine merchants of the middle ages slipped a little ambergris (but only a little) into their finest wines.

Today it is the mysterious perfume trade which absorbs most of the mysterious ambergris. Perfume takes in many strange and romantic articles, sandalwood, frankincense gum-resin, tonka beans from Brazil, geranium leaves from Madagascar, cinnamon, civet in sealed buffalo horns from Abyssinia. But whether the expert is concocting the favourite rose scent, lily-of-the-valley, or carnation, he will need ambergris to give his perfume

that ethereal, delectable and lingering aroma which marks the truly luxurious product.

For years the text-books have been telling us, rather too dogmatically, that ambergris is formed as the result of a disease in the sperm whale. This remains to be proved. Certainly ambergris has often been found in diseased sperms. I remember my old friend Captain Hans Jorgensen (manager at Hangklip and Donkergat whaling stations) telling me about a whaling and sealing expedition to Kerguelen in which he took part. Blizzards raged all through that southern summer on the fringe of the Antarctic, and the venture would have been a dead loss but for the capture of a sperm whale which seemed to have been dying when it was harpooned.

That sperm was loaded with ambergris. It paid for the expedition.

Sperm whales feed on cuttle fish. The beaks of the cuttle fish are often found embedded in ambergris. Thus the belief arose that the beaks irritated the whale's stomach or large intestine, causing an unidentified disease of which ambergris was a product.

This theory has been weakened by the discovery of huge lumps of ambergris in two perfectly healthy sperm whales. These whales were hauled aboard the factory ship *Southern Harvester* during a recent Antarctic season. One was a forty-nine foot sperm which yielded a veritable "boulder" of ambergris weighing over nine hundred pounds! It seemed that such an obstruction must have ruptured even a whale's large intestine; but the doctor

found nothing of the kind. That sperm was leading a natural, healthy life and carrying on the normal digestive processes up to the moment it was harpooned.

A previous sperm with ambergris weighing over three hundred pounds, cut up in the same factory ship, was also in prime condition. So the tradition of the sperm with ambergris being invariably a lean old invalid went by the board. Ambergris may be a “biliary concretion”, as some scientists have laid down, but it may also be nothing more than an unusually large and hard lump of whale dung which has undergone some chemical transformation, mixed with relics of food.

Every museum director knows the hopeful visitor who has found on the seashore a substance which he firmly

believes to be ambergris. Ambergris is not always easy to identify because there are several varieties. It may smell like stable manure when fresh; but after a time the typical, fragrant musky odour arises. Ambergris is derived from the French *gris* (grey) and the Arabic *amber*, the fossil resin. But not all ambergris is grey. Sometimes it is black and soft; when you scrape it with a knife a dark brown interior is revealed. This is low grade ambergris. Dark grey is better, and the slate grey or rare white ambergris are the most valuable forms.

Next time your eyes light on something which may be ambergris, apply a few simple tests. Remember that all ambergris floats on sea water. Cut off a piece no larger than a pea and drop it into alcohol. If it is ambergris it will dissolve. Plunge a hot

wire into your find and sniff; it should give out a resinous odour. Some ambergris is aromatic. It may be fishy. Often it has the same aroma as the ocean.

I suppose the odds against any ordinary beachcomber (like myself) finding a piece of ambergris are a million to one. Even the professional whaler men call it a great day when they come across a fragment. Captain Pihl, a most experienced Norwegian skipper who commanded the whaler *Tygerberg* shortly before World War II, told me that he had seen ambergris twice in his life. The first time was at a French West African whaling station in 1906, when a ten-pound lump was found. Then he had to wait until 1937, off Saldanha, when he harpooned a sperm with a lump worth about £600 in its intestines.

Another decade passed, and then the Saldanha whalers made several hauls of ambergris in one season. One lump was said to be worth £10,000, but I doubt whether it fetched as much on the London market.

It is a sad fact that far more ambergris goes unrecognised than the amounts which reach the perfume-makers. Years ago I was told at one of the Saldanha Bay whaling stations that the coloured labourers must have thrown away unknown quantities of ambergris before they were taught to save it from the other debris of the blood-smeared and greasy slipway. There is also the ambergris which has always drifted ashore on lonely and uninhabited beaches, ambergris worth millions gone to waste.

I also recall a queer story related to me by a sailing-ship master who settled in

Cape Town. "My ship was becalmed, and a seaman fished a large piece of grey fat out of the sea," declared the captain. "He took it to the mate on the poop, and was told to grease one of the masts with it. Another seaman came forward and announced that it was ambergris, but no one believed him. This man saved a few fragments and sold them when the ship reached port; but the mast had been greased with fat worth hundreds of pounds!"

In African waters the best place to search for ambergris is Lamu Island, north of Zanzibar. Once a hungry native woman was setting a fish trap when she found a lump which was afterwards sold for several hundred pounds. Finds of ambergris are so frequent at Lamu that the Government insists that all ambergris shall be brought to the Customs House and

sold by auction, forty-nine per cent of the proceeds going to the finder.

An old sailing whaler put out from Durban many years ago to hunt among the Indian Ocean islands. She was heading for Durban again months later after an unlucky cruise when a lump of ambergris was sighted on the surface of the sea – ambergris worth £12,000. Sperm whales seem to love the Indian Ocean; hence the many finds of ambergris in those waters. Arabs sailing down to Zanzibar in their dhows have picked up ambergris. And the ocean currents also carry the ambergris to Madagascar. On the other side of Africa, there are famous "ambergris beaches" near the mouth of the Senegal river. Dead sperms are washed up there. Long ago the Moslems of that territory built themselves a mosque with rafters of sperm

whales' skeletons. And they sent ambergris and gold dust all the way across the Sahara on camelback to Cairo.

"Old male sperm whales with the white heads are the ones that carry ambergris," say the Norwegian whaler men. It is never found in the female of the species, and that is another of the mysteries of ambergris.

I said earlier that false killer whales "appear to commit suicide". Contrary to popular belief animals do not commit suicide. It is due to faulty observation when people declare that a scorpion, ringed in by fire, stings itself to death. And when the false killer whales throw themselves out of the sea on to rocks or sand and perish there by the hundred it is not suicide. This is a mystery which some

naturalists have solved to their own satisfaction, if not to mine.

The false killer whale is a mammal that came back from the past in rather more dramatic fashion than the fish called *Coelacanth*. Like the fish, this black eighteen foot whale (a close but harmless relative of the true killer) was first discovered as a fossil and was believed to be extinct. One specimen was found on the site of New Scotland Yard in London and is now in the crime museum. Egyptians traded in false killer teeth, which are like pegs; though it is hard to understand why they were regarded as valuable. These teeth have also been found in Persian tombs.

No one expected to set eyes on a living false killer. Then, about a century ago, a school of about one hundred suddenly appeared in the Bay

of Kiel; and not long afterwards some were stranded on Danish islands. Thus the naturalists were able to restore the little whale, which they termed *Pseudorca*, to the roll of living creatures.

Apparently the false killer belonged to the open sea and approached the land so seldom that it remained unknown. Having once visited the shore it came again and again – by sheer chance, of course, and at long intervals of years. It was seen in Tasmania last century; while this century it has appeared once in New Zealand waters, once at Zanzibar, once in Scotland, once in England and four times near Cape Town. Evidently it is widely distributed.

Possibly it was sheer chance that led the rare creature into Cape waters on four separate occasions. Or the geo-

graphy of these four stranding's may have some bearing on the mystery. I wish that I could tell you.

Stranding is not really the exact word for the phenomenon of the false killers. This is not a slow drifting ashore. It is a deliberate movement, carried out with great determination. The whales swim in schools of two or three hundred or more. When they make for the shore it is a mad dash to death, and nothing will stop them. If you carry a stranded false killer back to the sea it will return to the beach and die. This is not theory. Kind people have done it often and noticed the result with amazement.

False killers were first recorded at the Cape on Christmas Eve 1928, when about one hundred were stranded and died on Kommetjie beach. The next stranding was on the Mamre coast in

1935, and this event I have described fully elsewhere.⁹ I think the next arrival, at St. Helena Bay in 1935, was the most remarkable of all, for the whales seemed to avoid the sandy beaches close at hand and chose a jagged reef where they tore themselves cruelly. They came ashore on Mr. Koos Heydenrijk's farm Varkvlei two miles from the Berg River mouth.

It was at the top of one of the highest tides known for years that fifty whales made for the shore. They had been seen thrashing about offshore for several days previously, but had not approached the rocks. The only person who saw the actual stranding was a fourteen-year-old schoolboy, Jimmy Prins. He was fishing from the rocks

when he noticed a commotion in the bay and saw the whales rushing towards the shore as though they were mad.

"They were blowing huge spouts of water into the air and making a great noise," Jimmy Prins reported. "I was frightened and ran away. From the bushes some distance off the beach I watched them flinging themselves over the sharp rocks. They were spread out over a wide front in the sea, but when they came in they chose the rocks. Near the shore they struggled violently to get out of the water. Most of them were deeply gashed, and the water was stained with blood. They used their flippers to lever their heavy bodies ashore, and kept beating their tails against the rocks. In ten minutes about fifty of them had come ashore

⁹ In my book "So Few Are Free", published in 1946 and now out of print. '.

and it was all over. But they took a long time to die.”

Mr. Reay Smithers, a zoologist on the South African Museum staff who had investigated the Mamre coast stranding, arrived at Varkvlei farm as soon as he learnt of the event, but this was eleven days afterwards. Some of the whales had been cut up for biltong and oil, and the rest had decomposed.

He looked for the cause of the stranding. Someone declared that the whales had been attacked by sharks and offered to point out some of the sharks, which had been washed up with the whales. These sharks turned out to be common dogfish, the largest three feet six inches long. So that theory had to be abandoned.

Sand in the blowholes of the whales was suggested as a cause of their

frenzied dash. Mr. Smithers rejected it, as there is no evidence that sandy water irritates a whale.

After a careful study of the surroundings, Mr. Smithers thought it was possible that the whales had swum by chance into a small bay and became excited when they found that it was landlocked. In the mad rush that followed, some returned to deep water while others were stranded.

Mr. Heydenrijk, owner of the farm, was convinced that unusual phosphorescent effects in the sea which he had noticed for several days were responsible in some way for the stranding.

False killer whales, like much larger whales, feed on cuttlefish, and also on ordinary fish. It has been suggested that a school of whales in the search for food might encounter one of the

giants of the squid or octopus species, and that this monster would cause a panic and drive the whales ashore.

When the Mamre coast stranding's occurred I questioned everyone present, including a marine biologist. I asked whether he had found any signs of disease in the whales; but after a number of dissections he was convinced that all those he had examined had been healthy. There were no signs of a submarine upheaval. If any larger creature had frightened the whales out of the sea, there were no signs of it.

A fourth Cape stranding of false killers, about a dozen of them, was reported in August 1958 from a small bay near Die Kelders on the Hermanus coast. A member of the South African Museum staff who visited the scene thought it strange that there should have been so few of them. He was also

puzzled by the fact that the whales were lying on a wide, open beach. They had certainly not been trapped.

So the false killer mystery deepens with the years. No one knows why these oceanic whales should migrate to shallow water at intervals of years. It is not a regular migration, like the mass movement of other whale species from the Antarctic northwards every year. Apparently it has nothing to do with breeding.

It has been suggested that changes in the distribution of their food supplies bring the false killers in from mid-ocean to unfamiliar coastal areas. There, in shallow water or among breaking seas the false killers lose their heads and become stranded. In their excitement they seem to be throwing themselves on shore deliberately. After the fourth stranding

I asked Dr. K. H. Barnard for an explanation. He is South Africa's leading scientific authority on whales, especially rare whales; the man who collected many fine specimens for the whale section at the South African Museum. Dr. Barnard shook his head. He did not think that any of the theories had been proved. The false killers are a mystery still.

Chapter Nineteen

AFRICAN MERMAIDS

THOUGH I do not believe in mermaids, I have seen nature's mermaid-like creatures and man's ingenious fakes, so that it is possible to understand how the legend arose. Sailor men recorded their encounters with mermaids thousands of years ago. A typical mermaid appeared on a Phoenician coin. And mammals of the order of *Sirenia* swam in thousands in the Mozambique Channel and other African waters.

I suppose the scientists were in romantic mood when they named the East African dugongs and West African manatees after the beautiful though mythical sirens of the sea. These queer mammals are now recognised as creatures without near relations in the ocean; but their bones and teeth, and breasts close to the fore-limbs, place

them nearer to the elephants than any other animal. They are certainly not related to whales or seals. Male dugongs have tusks. It seems that a land species broke up long ago, and that one branch took to the sea and started the mermaid story.

At short range you would not detect much resemblance between the *Sirenia* and the mermaids. The *Sirenia* are ugly, grey, torpedo-shaped mammals a little larger than human beings. In the distance, however, a female dugong with a young one at breast, raised above the surface of the water, gives an unmistakable impression of the traditional mermaid. They hold their babies to their very human breasts with their flippers. And there you have the true origin of a

story embroidered by seafaring men all through the centuries.¹⁰

Showmen have taken advantage of humanity's undying interest (and belief?) in mermaids, and have provided stuffed dugongs and other more fantastic oddities. Some of the fakes were so cleverly made that they were difficult to expose until X-rays came to the aid of the scientist. Dr. Graham, a former colonial surgeon in Sierra Leone, discovered a most convincing mermaid constructed in Freetown by a cunning negro craftsman. It had a small, mummified body which appeared remarkably human, and the tail of a fish. The secret lies in

joining a monkey's skeleton to a fish's bones and tail with such skill that no one can tell where the monkey leaves off and the fish begins. Egyptian swindlers achieve the effect with a monkey and a Nile perch.

Barnum the showman (of "a sucker born every minute" fame) once drew thousands to see an "African mermaid" He had ten thousand pamphlets printed showing a young woman with flowing hair. But when the suckers had paid for admission they say only a black, fearsome, shrivelled fish about three feet long, and so misshapen that a naturalist would have failed to identify the species. Imaginative people, on the other hand, might have formed an impression of semi-human appearance. Earlier mermaid fakes were known as "Jenny Hanivers", and

¹⁰ Christopher Columbus was the first seaman to describe the manatee, in these words: "In a bay on the coast of Hispaniola I saw three sirens; but they were not nearly as beautiful as old Horace's"

were skates or rays with coloured glass eyes.

I remember two fine dugongs which were exhibited as mermaids on the old Adderley Street pier in Cape Town about thirty years ago. They were netted by a Greek fisherman off Inhaca Island, Delagoa Bay; first the female, crying out in a low-pitched voice; and then months afterwards, a male dugong at the same spot.

This was considered a rare catch, for the dugong is seldom found as far south as Delagoa Bay. The fisherman, Mr. D. Levanos, gave up fishing and went on tour with his merman and mermaid, finding it an easier and more profitable life. It is in the Red Sea, along the Kenya coast and among the Comoro islands that dugongs are still fairly plentiful. Once the Red Sea and East African waters teemed with them,

but the hunters have thinned out the herds and there is a danger of extinction.

Aden was always a great place for mermaids of the dugong breed. I am told that the stuffed dugong is now out of fashion there. Visitors are taken to see a live, dusky mermaid of traditional build. The lady slips into the water before the visitors can make a close examination of her tail, and she swims away vigorously. But she is back on her perch, combing her dark hair, before the next batch of visitors have paid for admission to the waterfront house where she lives.

I was puzzled by reports in May 1931 of a strange creature with a human head in the Langebaan lagoon, Saldanha Bay. Mr. Joe Florentino, skipper of the cutter Maria Salu, was the first to sight it. He and his crew were positive

that it was not a seal. They could not have been mistaken on that point because seals are to be seen in Saldanha Bay every day. They were sure it was a creature such as they had never seen before.

It is unfortunate that an interesting and unusual animal is always shot in South Africa, and that was the fate of the lagoon visitor. The fishermen had wounded it with a harpoon; then another boat went out with an armed party and a bullet struck the head. In spite of these injuries the visitor submerged and escaped, but not before one of the hunters had identified it by its size, face and peculiar cleft tail, as a dugong.

The dugong belongs to warm eastern waters, and no reference to an Atlantic dugong will be found in the annals of natural history. This progress through

the cold waters off the Gape was a sensational event, and the museum authorities must have regretted the loss of the specimen. That dugong had travelled a long way from the rest of the species. It deserved to find sanctuary in Saldanha Bay. The sea-grass eaten by dugongs grows in the bay, and the foreign visitor must have enjoyed its meals there. This herbivorous diet is another example of the differences between the *Sirenia* and the other sea mammals which live on fish or plankton.

A live dugong or manatee is a rare sight in captivity. A few manatees reached the London Zoo at various times, but only one survived for as long as three years. Two dugongs were brought in by fishermen at Malindi, the Kenya seaside resort in 1958, and spent a few days in the swimming bath

of an hotel. They were filmed and then released unharmed. As a rule, the timid dugong dies of fright soon after it has been netted. A female dugong which has been robbed of her young, however, shows no fear but swims round the boat uttering piteous cries.

Dugong flesh is extremely palatable, without a trace of fishy flavour. Dugong oil is prized as a medicine in the treatment of chest and bronchial complaints and rheumatism. It has the properties of cod liver oil but tastes much better. The leather is useful, and some writers have stated that the Tabernacle of the Israelites was roofed with dugong skins. So the dugong faces extinction in spite of the efforts of many governments.

Manatees are found in rivers and coastal waters on both sides of the Atlantic. They lack the whiskers of the

dugong, their tails are rounded, and they are a little smaller; but these are the only important differences. West African manatees find their way inland as far as Lake Chad, no doubt causing rumours of mermaids in the Sahara. The fore-paw or flipper of the manatee has nails and resembles the human hand; so the name manatee (from *manatus*, hand) is appropriate.

The manatee is much less of a seafarer than the dugong, and I was surprised to hear the St. Helena fishermen talking about Manatee Bay when I was out with them after tunny. I found Manatee Bay on the map, however, near the southern corner of the island. And I set out to solve the mystery of the St. Helena mermaids.

Sure enough, the archives in the Jamestown castle provided me with the origin of the name. As far back as

August 1682 several “sea-cows” were caught at the place now known as Manatee Bay. (Some years later a four hundred pound lump of ambergris was found there.) In those days a corselet of manatee or dugong skin was supposed to be proof against pistol shots. The governor of St. Helena gave orders that a royalty would be imposed on future catches of “sea-cow”.

Dampier, the buccaneer, heard of the “sea-cows” at St. Helena and recorded his surprise. He pointed out that there was no suitable food for them, and that from the description he thought they must be sea-lions.

Dr. Walter Henry, a military doctor who was at St. Helena early last century, has shown by many of his descriptions that he was an alert and accurate observer. He noted: “We had sea cows at St. Helena, the *Trichechus*

Dugong, but they were not common. When shooting near Buttermilk Point with another officer one calm evening we stumbled on one lying on a low rock close to the water’s edge. A hideous, ugly brute it was, shaped like a large calf with bright green eyes as large as saucers. Only a glimpse we had, then it jumped into the sea.”

Lydekker the naturalist examined the evidence at the end of last century and decided that St. Helena was visited by a marine mammal, and that it was “far from uncommon though never abundant.” (The records I searched mentioned “sea-cows” in 1656, 1679, 1682, 1690, 1691, 1739, 1819 and 1910.) Lydekker knew that St. Helena, a mid-ocean island, was a most unlikely place to find a manatee. He thought that a dugong might live there,

but pointed out that there were no dugongs in the Atlantic.

Von Ihering, a German naturalist, accepted the evidence for the manatee and claimed that such a creature could only have spread from Brazil to Africa along the coast of a mainland. Thus St. Helena must once have formed part of an extensive land.

This theory ran contrary to the well-established opinion that St. Helena is an old volcano rising directly from the sea floor without any connection with South America or Africa.

The mystery of the St. Helena manatee was regarded by Mortensen, the Scandinavian zoologist, as so important that he visited the island thirty years ago to investigate the problem. He regarded it as unthinkable that a manatee had covered eighteen hundred

miles of open water from South America, or that a dugong had travelled over a thousand miles from Africa. But he was interested in the possibility of a former land connection.

Mortensen searched in vain for fossil evidence. He could find no evidence of a former seal colony, and he thought the “sea cows” and manatees were probably stray sea-lions from the Cape. He admitted, however, that an extinct species or genus of Sirenian might have rested there in days gone by. No doubt Mortensen was thinking of the third member of the order of *Sirenia*, the Steller’s sea-cow, which has been extinct for nearly two centuries. Possibly this careful scientist would have given a different opinion if he had known that a dugong would roam (or be carried by strong ocean

currents) as far from its usual haunts as the South Atlantic waters of Langebaan lagoon.

After studying evidence which was not available when such well-qualified naturalists as Lydekker and Mortensen tackled the mystery, I have come to the conclusion that more than one stray mammal visited St. Helena. Peter Mundy, a Cornishman, described an injured monster which came ashore in 1656 near Chapel Valley in these words: "When I touched it the beast raised its forepart, gaping on me with its wide and terrible jaws. It had the yellowish colour and terrible countenance of a lion, with four great teeth, besides smelling hairs or moustaches. It was ten feet long." Mundy left a drawing which depicts a sea elephant such as I have seen on the Cape coast on a number of occasions. Sea

elephants do stray northwards from Tristan da Cunha and the sub-Antarctic islands. I have no doubt at all that several of those "sea-cows" reported at St. Helena were sea elephants.

Were there dugongs at St. Helena as well? That is possible. J. C. Melliss, the St. Helena historian, thought that manatees had crossed the ocean; but such a journey would be so contrary to their known habits that it may be ruled out. The dugong is a traveller. A few dugongs may have reached St. Helena during the centuries that the island has been occupied.

Many a myth has grown up round the *Sirenia* besides the mermaid legend. Fishermen in the Comoro Islands, where dugongs are plentiful, say the dugongs are inhabited by the souls of the dead, unappeased by votive

offerings. There, too, you hear the ancient story of the sea-woman with beautiful body and seductive voice who lures sailors to their doom. According to the fishermen, their ancestors once caught a real mermaid, half woman, half-fish.

The dugong's low whistle as it breathes out through its nostrils still reminds us of Homer's story of the sirens on the rock of Scylla, calling the Greek seamen to their doom in the whirlpool of Charybdis.

On board the Arab dhows of the Indian Ocean there are many who believe in mermaids. Those crews still repeat the legend that Allah found a couple of illicit lovers in a canoe and transformed them into sirens as a punishment.

Francois Valentyn, eighteenth-century Dutch colonial chaplain who left such vivid descriptions of the Cape, was a firm believer in mermaids. He had seen the "Zee-Menschen" and "Zee-Wyven" of the Dutch East Indies and he wrote: "If any narrative in the world deserves credit, it is this. Should the stubborn world, however, hesitate to believe it, it matters nothing."

I remain stubborn and unbelieving – yet still greatly attracted by the strangest of all mammals, the *Sirenia* which made so many people believe in mermaids.

Chapter Twenty

HARBOUR LIGHTS

So many Table Bay landmarks have vanished in my time that I cling to the corners which have not changed much since I was a boy. Now here is a stoep at the docks where I rested my bicycle when I was thirteen; a café stoep where I have refreshed myself for nearly half a century.

Nowadays there is an aroma of chicken piri piri, grilled steak Portugaise and roasting coffee beans. I come here at night sometimes, bringing my own wine, to enjoy the green soup, the prawns and rice or deep-sea crab, and the Portuguese cheese. I remember the place when Ma Reece had it, between the wars. Medical students came from the New Somerset Hospital for morning tea. When my small yacht was on the slip

close by I had my Sunday morning breakfast there, tomato and bacon. Now you find perlemoen on the menu, and mushrooms and even rainbow trout; luxuries one did not imagine in Ma Reece's day.

However, there has always been something more for me than the menu at this harbour cafe. This is another window on the world. Here again is the magic of the sea. More foreign tongues are spoken than one man can understand. If you have known other waterfronts, then your memories will be stirred; for this place has something in common with San Pauli on the Elbe, the Ratcliffe Highway, the Boca and Schiedam Schiedyk. The sea is the link. These ships have known all the world's sailor towns. And the seafarer, pleasantly jingled, who is singing his

way back to his fo'c'stle has evidently known them all, too:

*We crossed the Line and Gulf
Stream,
We rounded Table Bay,
Then round the Horn and back
again,
For that's the sailor's way.*

Night takes the harshness from the docks. Small craft without much day-time beauty become caravels and galleons. Yes, this is the place where the wine and food arouse such memories that I can see not only the ships and seamen of my time but a far longer procession. Old hands at the docks made me imagine the Table Bay waterfront of a century and more ago, and though they have passed on their stories linger ...

Harbour records hide a great deal of romance, for the great volumes which I have studied at the archives give you little more than names and cargoes, masters and destinations. Yet there are names which roll off the tongue, and some of the early Dutch ships were among them: the *Wassende Maan* and *De Groene Papegaai*, *Vliegend Hart* and *De Vrouw Sybilla Antoinette*. In the Van Riebeeck period many Dutch ships were named either after animals or towns in the Netherlands. Thus you find, besides the *Dromedaris*, the *Haas* and *Windhond*, *Draak* and *Leeuwin*, and the *Dordrecht*, *Rotterdam* and *Hof van Zietland*.

I would like to have seen the English ship *Fair Barbadian*, for she must have had a figurehead to match her name. The *Zoroaster* is not so pleasing. As for the Portuguese brig

Jehovah, she was brought into Table Bay under suspicion of being a slaver.

Then there were the ships in which famous men served and travelled. Nelson touched at the Cape on his way to India in the *Sea Horse*, while Arthur Wellesley arrived in the frigate *Caroline*. Pringle the poet travelled in the *Brilliant* and Livingstone embarked for South Africa in the *George*.

Of course the old waterfront hands talked knowingly of the days of sail. One man who knew his clippers spoke affectionately of the *Tweed*, a beautiful ship with a queer story and a South African ending. Built of teak by the Wadias, the Parsee shipbuilding family of Bombay, she was given the lines of an old French frigate which happened to be lying in the harbour as a hulk. She was launched in the middle of last century as a paddle

steamer, and served first in the old East Indian Navy carrying troops to the Crimea. Then the redoubtable clipper owner, Captain John Willis, got hold of her, tore out the engines and rigged her for fast sailing.

Cape Town first saw the *Tweed* in the eighteen-sixties, when she was carrying the Seaforth Highlanders from India to England. And my friend the old sailor man described her as the largest and loveliest ship of her type ever built in India. Joseph Conrad would have agreed with that description. He admired the *Tweed* and wrote of her: "Officers of men-o'-war used to come on board to take the exact dimensions of her sail plan. Perhaps there had been a touch of genius or the finger of good fortune in the fashioning of her lines at bow and stern."

Yes, the *Tweed* was a flyer, and she made one run from England to Bombay in seventy-seven days. Her end came in July 1888, when she was towed into Algoa Bay dismasted. Her owners did not care to pay the salvage bill, so they handed over the fine teak hull. She was broken up on the beach and some of her teak may be seen to this day in the roof of a church at Port Elizabeth.

Those immortal rivals, *Cutty Sark* and *Thermopylae*, both rounded the Cape in their halcyon days. I often stared at the battered *Cutty Sark* when she was towed into Table Bay Docks in 1915, dismasted and dishevelled; a grand old lady whose best days had passed. She had been sailing under the Portuguese flag for about fifteen years, and she was bound from Lourenço Marques to Mossamedes with coal when she ran

into the gale that crippled her. Cape Town could not find spars for such a ship and she had to be re-rigged as a schooner.

When I first came to know Table Bay Docks there were still a few ancients who could recall such Victorian steam monsters as the *Himalaya* and *Great Britain*. Those two were in Table Bay together in November 1857, ranking as the two largest ships in the world and towering above a fleet of sixty-five ships. The reason for this armada was the Indian Mutiny.

The *Himalaya* carried troops to the Crimea and she was still in commission as a trooper during the South African War. She was not so graceful as Brunel's *Great Britain*, with her six masts, fine clipper bow and row of black ports against a long white band.



I often stared at the battered Cutty Sark when she was towed into Table Bay Docks in 1915, dismasted and dishevelled.

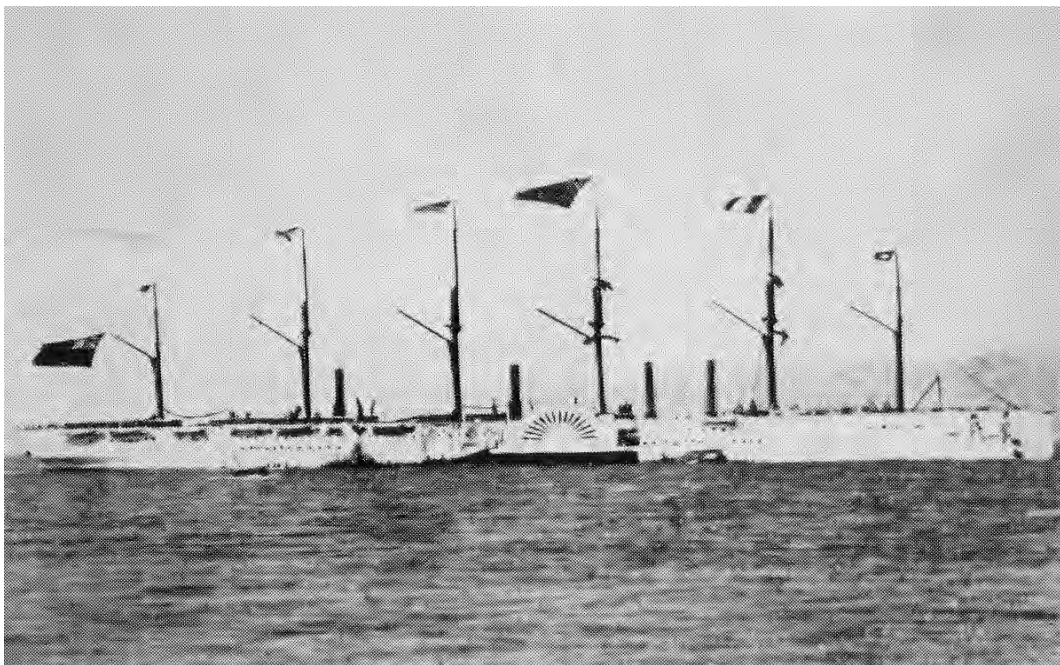
During the Australian gold rush the *Great Britain* paid handsomely, for she sailed well without her engines and carried hordes of passengers. And when the battle-cruisers *Invincible* and *Inflexible* coaled at Port Stanley in the Falklands in 1914 during the hunt for Von Spee, they filled their bunkers from the *Great Britain*. She is still there in a quiet cove, a famous hulk, and a tribute to the lasting quality of the iron used by British shipbuilders in the 'forties of last century.

Some years after the *Great Britain* came Brunel's costly failure, the *Great Eastern*. It was said that a riveter had been entombed in the vast bilge of the *Great Eastern* while under construction; and this ghost was heard pounding for help at various times during the great ship's fantastic career. Certainly

she killed many men in one way and another.

However, the curse seemed to have lifted when the *Great Eastern* steamed into Table Bay in 1869. No wonder the people of Cape Town called her the "floating island", for her displacement was over twenty thousand tons. Nothing larger than six thousand tons had been seen up to that time.

Eight thousand people paid a shilling a head and visited the *Great Eastern* as she lay far out in Table Bay. A reporter described her as "a floating palace of rich carpets, costly hangings, magnificent mirrors, pianos, libraries, with noble promenades permitting ladies, sheltered by bulwarks five feet high, to display the newest Parisian and London fashions with as much effect as in Regent Street or the esplanade at Brighton".



The curse seemed to have lifted when the Great Eastern streamed into Table Bay in 1869. No wonder the people of Cape Town called her the floating island.

On that occasion the *Great Eastern* had nearly four thousand miles of submarine cable coiled below her ornate cabins. She was on her way to lay the first Aden-Bombay cable, a link in the service between Britain and India. Soon afterwards the unlucky leviathan was laid up. She became a show boat for a time, and towards the end of last century she was broken up. They found the skeleton of the missing riveter inside the tank tops. Beside him was the skeleton of the boy who tended the forge. Seamen called the *Great Eastern* a “hoodoo ship”. I knew another such vessel in recent years. Sometimes it is difficult to find a crew for a ship with such a reputation.

Probably the unluckiest ship in southern waters for some years was the four-masted motor coaster *St. Germain*

of eleven hundred tons, nicknamed the “hoodoo ship of the Indian Ocean”. She was launched in Denmark as the *Epoca* six years after World War I, a pioneer among motor-coasters; and pioneers often have a hard time. Three French officers bought her in 1932, filled her holds with trade goods, and set out for the Indian Ocean islands in the hope of making a fortune. They had renamed her *Edouard Giraud*.

Soon after sailing the engine broke down. They drifted about the Atlantic for a long time while repairs were made, and when she reached Dakar at last some of the crew mutinied and refused to go any further. Negroes were signed on. Then the ship caught fire. She was repaired and went to sea, but had to put back with engine trouble. She sailed again, slap into a large British ship. Both ships had to

return to Dakar for repairs as a result of the collision.

When the *Edouard Giraud* left Dakar for the third time her engines began failing again but she managed to reach Takoradi. There the negroes deserted. More negroes were engaged, and she resumed her voyage. She was seen by the look-out on Signal Hill drifting for days with her engines disabled. At last she made Table Bay-thirty-four days out of Takoradi.

While she was under repair in Table Bay Docks the owners of the British ship (damaged in the collision off Dakar) attached the little French ship. The legal dispute was settled and the “hoodoo” moved on. She was next reported ashore on the Madagascar coast, but the owners refloated her after a month of effort. However, she was seriously damaged, crews looked

askance at her, and the *Edouard Giraud* spent more than two years in port before she smelt deep water again. Early in 1935 someone made an offer for her and she was towed to Durban for examination.

The crew which had manned the “hoodoo” during the passage to Durban left in a body on arrival. They declared that ghosts moaned in the cabins and wailed in the holds. The ship lay in Durban, piling up dock dues, for eight months while the surveyors tried to decide whether she ought to be repaired or scuttled. In the end her name was changed to *St. Germain* and she was loaded with manganese ore for Rotterdam. Almost inevitably she put into Table Bay for engine repairs. I never heard the end of the *St. Germain*, but I imagine that

the three French officers were glad to see the last of their “hoodoo ship”.

Table Bay Docks have known queer ships and strange characters, too. I suppose there are few indeed today who have even heard of Jack Cruse, one of the harbour personalities of the 'nineties of last century. He was well before my time, for he died about sixty years ago; but I heard of him from the old hands.

Jack Cruse was a seaman in the Royal Navy during the Crimean War, and found himself in trouble at Sebastopol as a result of a bet. He caught a Russian cannon-ball before it stopped rolling along the deck, a dangerous feat for which he was punished.

Cruse trained as a naval diver. Once in the Red Sea he volunteered to bring up the body and possessions of a Turkish

pasha from a sunken ship. Often in later years he described how he opened the cabin door, and the pasha floated towards him with arms extended. But he earned a useful reward for that exploit.,

The versatile Cruse worked in many capacities at sea, and finally gained his master's certificate in the merchant service. He was wrecked on Tristan da Cunha. Peter Green was there in those days, the Hollander who became leader of the islanders. Jack Cruse married one of Peter Green's daughters and settled in Cape Town. Cruse kept the Old Standard Hotel in Wynberg for a time. In his old age he went back to sea as master of the little Table Bay tug *Naomi*.

This was not the adventurous seafaring of his earlier days, for *Naomi* seldom went far beyond the breakwater. Her

task consisted of towing hoppers outside and dumping the refuse brought up by dredgers. Between these short trips, however he would relate episodes from the great voyages of the past. To the end of his days he maintained firmly that he had once seen the “Flying Dutchman” close at hand.

Another old Royal Navy man who has certainly not yet been forgotten was James Palmer, marine signalman at Table Bay Docks, nicknamed “Pedlar” Palmer. As a schoolboy I used to climb the ladder to the old look-out station on the breakwater. Many a cup of cocoa I drank there with this kindly signalman. He had an early wireless set, long before the broadcasting era, and I often put on the headphones and listened, deeply fascinated, to the ships.

Palmer was a sail-trained man. His naval experiences went back to the days when slavers were still being captured in East African waters. He also wore the Boxer Rising medal ribbon, for he was among those who had marched with the international brigade to relieve Peking.

Signalmen of his period were capable of memory feats which few would care to attempt nowadays. He could watch a semaphore working at fifteen words a minute and repeat a long message without writing it down. When he left the navy on the Cape station in 1906, Palmer was yeoman of signals in H.M.S. Crescent. He wound up his harbour service as harbourmaster at Kalk Bay.

I wish that I could pay my respects to all the docks characters who have passed on, and I cannot leave this

subject without mentioning the Quine dynasty of boatmen. Three generations of Quines handled the launches which met ships so that ship chandlers' canvassers might interview the captains. They often ran to Robben Island. And before the government took over the task, they handled the mooring lines of vessels large and small.

Rivals of the Quines were the Bells (father and son) and the Sullivans (father and son); but for many years the Quines had the *Cooee*, the fastest launch on the bay. All the launch owners had to face all sorts of weather in the old days, for many ships had to be served in Table Bay during north-west gales and summer south-easters. The Quines were at home in sea boots and oilskins. They knew what they were doing.

Cape Town lost a lot when they filled in the bay. The pier was a loss, but even more serious was the change of summer climate brought about by moving back the cooling sea.

Among the historic buildings sentenced to be scrapped in the name of progress was the fine old Customs House which once stood on the edge of Table Bay. This was built as the *tronk*, of course, and the Customs officials used the former condemned cell as their strong-room.

Robert Semple, an Englishman who was fond of walking about Cape Town early last century, wrote of this gaol: "It is at once the Bridewell, the Old Bailey, the Newgate of Cape Town; here the trials of life and death are held; hither delinquent slaves are sent to be corrected; and here prisoners are confined and led out to the place of

execution. Its only ornament is a small turret with a bell, which seldom tolls but on the last of these melancholy occasions. The office of the commissary of the Court of Marriage is likewise here, and to which every person must apply previous to marrying. Whether a man is going to be married or hanged, he must first pay a visit to the *tronk*.”

Less historic than the Customs House, but not without charm, was the “flat-iron” building on the other side of Adderley Street lower down. This was built very early this century for a shipping firm, and was designed rather like the prow of a ship. Spring tides almost reached the basement cafe where the owner was murdered, a ham-bone being the chosen weapon. Malays carried their fishing boats up to the walls. From the look-out tower

at one end, members of the shipping firm kept watch for their vessels.

I must be thankful that a little of the old waterfront remains, and console myself with the wine I mentioned, a Brazilian omelette and the company of friends on the cafe stoep.

Chapter Twenty-One

THE LILAC LINERS

AFTER all this talk of the sea, after so many adventures in deep water and shoal, I am afloat again myself in the ship of my choice. Las Palmas and the peaks of the Canaries have dropped astern, but the geraniums from my friend's garden at Santa Brigida are on my table. I shall be in London on Friday, after a voyage that seems to have passed almost as quickly as a flight across the world, and far more happily than any air journey. There is no rest in the sky, and no room for flowers.

Every country has its old established shipping line, the one above all others which has become part of its history. The lilac Union-Castle liners hold that position in South African waters, and this is the *Pendennis Castle*. She is the

finest liner I have ever known, and swiftly she is bearing me towards Southampton; swiftly, in great comfort, but without a shock or tremor or even a moment of doubt. Can you say that about your air journeys? With the scars of an unhappy landing on my forehead I can say no such thing.

One of these days the *Pendennis Castle* and the rest of the lilac fleet will be doing this run of six thousand miles in eleven or twelve days. And I suppose some of the passengers will grumble and declare that the fourteen days' run was more restful. The grumbler is an incredible person. No doubt you know the old-fashioned white-painted ship's bathroom, all taps and valves and steam, with an enormous tub filled with sea water. In the *Pendennis* the bathrooms are decorated in pastel shades, and might



This is the Pendennis Castle. She is the finest liner I have ever known, and swiftly she is bearing me towards Southhampton.

form part of a modern flat. You can work everything yourself if you like, without the aid of a steward. But there is no salt water. Every passenger bathes in fresh water as he does on shore, as often as he wishes. So now the grumbler has discovered a grievance. The hot salt water baths were good for him, and he misses them. A medical friend tells me that hot baths are good for many conditions, but in this respect there is not a scrap of difference between salt water and fresh. Except, of course, that you do not feel sticky after a fresh water bath.

No one grumbles about the stabilizers. I must confess that I never thought it would be possible to resist the power of the sea. Moreover, after many voyages in small craft it did not occur to me that even heavy rolling might be regarded as a hardship. I am never

seasick, and I was not drawn to the *Pendennis Castle* because of the stabilizers. The old German anti-rolling tanks failed, and I doubted whether this new device would work. Of course I should have realised that a piece of machinery resembling a fish's fin, *and costing a quarter of a million pounds*, would not have been installed if it had not passed every test. No longer do I find myself clinging to rails and pillars. There is a serene quality about this voyage which has converted me to stabilizers. No crash of broken crockery. No thudding of trunks against the cabin bulkheads.

My friends who came to say good-bye on board this ship seemed a little wistful as they gazed at the show-cases (like a London shopping arcade), the open-air swimming bath, my single cabin with its full-sized bed,

and other wonders. I am sure they were sorry to lose me for three months; but I could see they were imagining themselves in this world of ease.

It is a relief to give up housekeeping and fall into a routine in which every detail may be left safely to others. Last time I travelled with Commodore G. H. Mayhew, in a previous Union-Castle flagship, I used to sit listening to a passenger who could answer all my questions on those favourite topics of mine – food and wine. He was an hotel manager trained in London, a portly man of benevolent appearance who had held a high post at Buckingham Palace in the days of King George V. I had the pleasure of introducing him to the Cape wines, for the good Roodeberg and La Gratitude of the ship's wine list were outside his

experience. He taught me a great deal about royal and other catering, and one day I asked him what he thought of the Union-Castle mail ship food and service. His reply, over sherry and olives, was sincere and memorable. "If only I knew that I would be able to enjoy this standard of living for the rest of my life I would die happy," he declared,

So now I am again leading a pampered life, with far more ambitious meals than my good servant Lizzie cooks for me. For those who like the organised shipboard entertainments – and they are in the majority – there are games of many kinds, dances and cinema shows. You need not carry money on board ship, for almost everything is free once you have paid your fare. For me, there are the long walks round the decks, the lovely blue-tiled swimming

pool under the sun, the library with fifteen hundred books,, the sundowner hour before. dinner, all the lazy pleasures, of the ocean.

I collect menus, and during a voyage I never fail to call on the chef and visit the kitchens and storerooms. Most of the seagoing chefs I have met started their careers as scullions and worked their way up to the tall white hat of a *chef de cuisine*. Mr. Arthur Garwood of the *Pendennis Castle* is an exception. He came to sea five or six years ago after training and long experience of the great British hotels and London restaurants. His youthful assistants (aged from sixteen to twenty-five) qualified in cooking at various technical institutes in Britain and the Union-Castle catering school on shore, and are now applying the finer points under expert supervision. They are

keen, clean, well-paid young men. Some of them drive their own motor-cars between voyages. They are following a profession rather than just doing a job to make a living.

I am glad to find a decent atmosphere behind the scenes, because this is always reflected in the food and service. All these men, kitchen staff and stewards, have their own comfortable mess rooms, admirably decorated, where they can enjoy good food in leisurely fashion with their glasses of beer. You still hear the story that stewards eat hasty meals standing up; and years ago that was only too true. Today the employers and the unions have agreed upon hours of work and conditions which have taken most of the hardship out of going to sea. I like this state of affairs.

Yes, the *Pendennis Castle* is a first-class hotel. I have an idea that I am faring better now on the face of the ocean than I shall at the London hotel (by no means inexpensive) where I shall arrive on Friday. Mr. Garwood has been giving us some memorable menus. I like a complete change of diet while on holiday, and in this ship I have selected many English delicacies which are almost unknown in South Africa. One day I had smoked trout for lunch, followed by curried pheasant, blackberry and apple pudding and cream, and Double Gloucester cheese. They carry many of the world's great cheeses in this ship, and I am widening my knowledge every day with Austrian smoked cheese, Caerphilly, White Cheshire and others that are new to me, besides such

favourites as ripe Camembert and Stilton.

Mr. Garwood tells me that he has a high opinion of certain items of food which he takes on board at Union ports. He has found a South African bacon, made by a man from Wiltshire, which is equal in flavour to any English bacon. The maker follows the Wiltshire method, even to the extent of importing the oak chips. And he has won thirteen gold cups with this product.

You may be surprised to hear that Mr. Garwood regards kingklip as the most beautiful fish (from the chef's point of view) in Cape waters. He serves it fried in butter with a sliced banana on top. Mr. Garwood is no great admirer of South African meat, and neither am I. He puts Argentine beef at the top of the list, and Canterbury lamb from

New Zealand first in that class. (That is one reason why I relish each meal – tender meat at last!) Yet Mr. Garwood declares that the milk-fed three-pound chickens he orders at Port Elizabeth, and the veal from Cape Town, are equal to anything he has found elsewhere. He is also an admirer of the large Cape soles (ten to twelve ounces), the South African melons, pears, avocado pears and grapes, and all the South African canned fruits.

I noticed bottles of white and red Constantia wines in Mr. Garwood's office. These are the wines he uses every day in cooking. He is also a firm believer in monosodium glutamate to bring out delicate flavours, and there he has not only the scientists on his side but also thousands of ordinary housewives.

I have always suspected that chefs possess secrets which are never revealed in recipe books. (Just try to present such a simple dish as poached eggs in the shape and style favoured by the professional chef, and you will fail miserably.) The chef carries his art in his head. He may have a copy of Escoffier's massive work in his office – the only cookery book which is revered by experts – but he is really a man with a memory. Like the professional magician, he will not reveal all his secrets. However, I shall buy some of that bacon when I get home. And I have as a souvenir a new menu for my collection, the finest dinner menu of the voyage, which I shall not give you in full because you would not believe it. Nevertheless, here is a short impression.

I by-passed the hors d'oeuvres on this farewell night and started with that fish in a million, Scotch salmon with Hollandaise sauce and noisette potatoes. Then I fought a battle with myself over the asparagus with melted butter and the braised York ham with spinach, and resisted both of them. My main choice was given in favour of the Tournedos Pendennis, tenderest steak I had tasted for two years. This was accompanied by runner beans, croquette potatoes and tomatoes. I will not arouse your jealousy by describing the roast saddle of lamb, the cold buffet and other dishes which filled a menu of two pages. Pass over the plum pudding ablaze, the cherry soufflé and other delicacies and finish as I did, with the ice cream called Madame Pompadour. This is, of course, an ice cream shaped like a

crinoline, with a superb flavour. Mr. Garwood, you have added nobly to my experience of life.

My first Union-Castle liner sailed out of Table Bay so long ago that I cannot remember her. But I can just recall that Cape Town gala season over half a century ago when the Union Castle excursions to Simonstown started. I had come down from Kimberley, where my father was editor of the *Diamond Fields Advertiser*, for a merciful midsummer holiday at the sea. Never was sea air more welcome.

Special trains ran from Monument station to Table Bay Docks during that gay January, carrying the crowds to the breakwater. The band of the Cape Peninsula Rifles played, and Madame Kate Midwinter sang. And not surprisingly, as a newspaper reported, "the

wind came singing across the bay and claimed a couple of hats". But it was a happy month, with regattas on the bay, an industrial exhibition in the town and sideshows in the Government Avenue paddocks.

I have been refreshing my memory from the newspaper reports, of course, for in the year 1908 I was only eight years old. There was an art show at the City Hall, with pictures by Constance Penstone and Crosland Robinson. But the people who savoured Cape Town's gala to the full were those from up-country, escaping from the heat; and they wanted ships and the sea.

They were welcomed on board the *Kinfauns Castle*, "a fine and stately vessel" as one reporter noted. The ship's orchestra entertained them and refreshments were served. Two little Thesen coasters, the *Ingerid* and

Agnar, ran sea trips to Duiker Point. How they packed three hundred trippers into the *Agnar* I cannot imagine; but it was done, at half-a-crown a head (children half price). And each trip lasted two-and-a-half hours.

However, the great sea event of the season was the Union-Castle excursion in the intermediate steamer *Goorkha* (Captain G. W. Armstrong) from Table Bay to Simons Bay. I recall boarding the special train at Monument with my parents, and embarking with five hundred others in the *Goorkha* at the South Arm. She cast off at about ten in the morning and moved past the low, garden suburb of Sea Point where the houses were so scattered that you could easily identify the homes of those who were holding mirrors in the sun.

I wish that I had kept the lunch menu. All I can say now is that the *Cape Times* reporter wrote: "Lunch – and what a lunch. It suited every palate. The chief steward deserved great credit for coping with appetites whetted by the glorious sea breeze."

Landing all those passengers at the town pier in Simonstown was no mean feat. Nevertheless, they returned to Cape Town in two trains that afternoon. I think the most remarkable achievement of all was the inclusive price of that outing; for the voyage, lunch, landing charge at Simonstown and rail fare to Cape Town worked out at twelve shillings and sixpence a head! No wonder the *Galeka* was well filled when she repeated the excursion later in the month. A third excursion in the *Galician* was organised in March.

So the Simonstown voyages became one of the regular pleasures of the Cape holiday season. In the early summer of 1910 the new liner *Grantully Castle* picked up hundreds of eager trippers. Unfortunately a south-east gale blew up off Cape Point. When the ship reached the Simonstown anchorage it was blowing so hard that Captain Sylvester was unwilling to allow anyone to land. Passengers not only received a magnificent lunch for their twelve and sixpence, but an excellent dinner and first class cabins for the night. In the morning the south-easter had blown itself out and the tugs were able to carry everyone to the pier. However the uncertainty about landing conditions at Simonstown put an end to a most interesting enterprise. My own memories of the only twelve and

sixpenny voyage of my life are entirely happy.

Since then I have known many of these lilac liners, and some of them I have followed all through their careers. As a young reporter I described the arrival of the *Arundel Castle* on the South African scene. With her four funnels, geared turbines and cruiser stern, the nineteen thousand ton *Arundel* was looked upon as a *Mauretania* or Olympic of the south. Smuts travelled in her; and once she had four millionaires on the same voyage – Sir David Harris, Sir Abe Bailey, Sir George Albu and Mr. Solly Joel.

After thirty-seven years of service the *Arundel Castle* sailed over the Table Bay horizon for the last time. It was a dramatic exit, which thousands along the Sea Point waterfront will always

remember. She carried two funnels instead of four when she went to the ship breakers; she burnt oil instead of coal; she was longer and larger. But the hull was still lilac, and many of those who watched her passing must have thought of her as the ship that had shown them the romance of the ocean in the days of their youth.

I am told that no lovelier steamer than the *Scot* ever entered South African waters. She was a Union liner at her launching of course, but she wore the Union-Castle lilac later in her career. Though I never set eyes on the *Scot*, I can believe those who assure me that her beauty was matched only by her speed.

I have watched the finish of many a London-Cape record flight, but not one of them caused the sensation that the *Scot* created on Sunday, March 19,

1893, when she came tearing up to the Table Bay breakwater after her run of fourteen days, eighteen hours, fifty-seven minutes from Southampton. That was a record indeed, and as everyone knows it remained unbroken for almost half a century.

Nearly three-quarters of a century before the *Scot*, the pioneer steamer, the paddle-wheeler *Enterprise*, had reached Table Bay and had been greeted from the Castle with a salute of guns. She had taken fifty-eight days from Falmouth. Another quarter of a century passed, and the *Hellespont* cut the time to thirty-five days.

Now everyone has forgotten the Currie chartered steamer *Penguin* which ran from Dartmouth to Table Bay in 1872 in twenty four days eighteen hours. Mail contract time at that period allowed thirty-seven days. And when,

in 1873, the *Penguin* was beaten by the *Windsor Castle* (twenty-three days) the merchants of Cape Town were so delighted that they held a banquet in honour of the captain and officers.

Some will recall the dramatic rumour, early in World War I, that the *Mauretania* had raced from Britain to Simonstown in twelve days with troops and ammunition. Only a few had seen her (according to rumour) because she had arrived at night, unloaded her cargo and departed before daybreak – an impossible feat. There was no truth in the *Mauretania* rumour. The *Scot* held the record until the run of thirteen days nine hours made in 1935 by the *Stirling Castle*.

The last decade of last century saw a burst of speed on the Cape run. Passengers were accustomed to a

voyage of three weeks, and a trip to England in eighteen days was a breath-taking experience. Sir Donald Currie's first ship specially designed as a record-breaker was the *Dunottar Castle* (spelt with one "n", unlike the motor ship *Dunnottar Castle* which followed her). The single-screw steamer *Dunottar Castle* was Currie's first ship with two funnels; but the first class cabins were still placed aft according to the old-fashioned sailing-ship custom. She made a southbound record in 1890 of seventeen days nineteen hours fifty minutes.

Then came the Scot of the Union Line, five hundred feet overall, with a clipper bow and long fo'c'stle that grudging sailing ship men were forced to admire. She had a male figurehead, (Sir William Wallace) and much ornamental scrollwork on her bows,

and the Royal Arms of Scotland and England on her stern. Even her pair of tall funnels were graceful. In her day, the Scot earned the reputation for beauty that the *Mauretania* gained some years later. The black paint of her early career was soon replaced by white, and then she became known as the "White Albatross of the South". Her final colour was the familiar lilac.

Now that a mail ship costs ten million pounds the Scot sounds like a bargain at only a quarter of a million. Unfortunately she was no money-spinner for her owners. The bunkers held three thousand tons of coal and she needed them, for she ate coal at the rate of one hundred and seventy tons a day. Her twin screws gave her a speed of eighteen and a half knots, and nineteen when she was pushed – fast going in the 'nineties' of last century and for



In her day, the Scot earned the Reputation for beauty that the Maurtania gained some years later ... She became known as the White Albatross of the South.

long afterwards. Nearly one hundred firemen toiled at the thirty-six furnaces. They were the unseen, cursing, sweating heroes of the famous record run.

Apparently the passengers who embarked in the *Scot* at Southampton for that historic run were unaware that the master, Captain de la Cour Travers, was out for the record. Certainly the news was a long time reaching the third class. I have before me a diary kept by a young third class passenger who became a prosperous Cape Town business man. His comments give an intimate picture of life in the cheapest accommodation during the passage.

“Eight in a cabin this trip – four too many,” he wrote. “Cabins open into the dining-room. The electric light is splendid. Just turn a button and the

thing is done. No matches and hence no danger. This is a magnificent ship. To stand at one end and look right down the deck is like looking down a long street.”

Later he noted that the *Scot* was like a village, with public house included. People with children made a point of calling at the bakery in the middle of the morning to wheedle additional cakes. A typical third class dinner menu consisted of stewed steak, swedes, potatoes and rice pudding. The laundry was run by two old salts who had a tub and a lump of soap. “The barber charges sixpence – he should be a millionaire soon,” adds the diary.

One night a sea flooded the diarist’s cabin. A man was washed out of his bunk, and the baggage was drenched. It was calm in the Bay of Biscay,

however, and the doctor began to vaccinate the passengers.

Before the ship reached Madeira everyone knew that the Scot was trying to break the record. The diarist said that Captain Travers was making the attempt because it was his last voyage. (In fact, Captain Travers had just resigned his command because an officer junior to him had received the coveted shore post of marine superintendent at Southampton.)

Madeira came in sight much earlier than usual, and the Scot anchored off Funchal at nine on the Tuesday night instead of four on the Wednesday morning. No one was allowed on shore, but the islanders came on board selling bottles of wine at a shilling each, baskets at sixpence, wicker chairs for two shillings.

Third class passengers were invited to a concert in the first saloon while the Scot was in the tropics. "It was like a palace, with a fine piano, palms, revolving chairs and carved wood-work," recorded the diarist. So the days passed with such exciting games as draughts and halma, varied by a magic lantern show given by Captain Travers in person. He put on Queen Victoria's portrait first. Some laughed, others were embarrassed, when the portrait appeared upside down; and Travers had to fumble with the apparatus for three minutes before he got it right. Then the lights went out.

A baby, born a few days before the end of the passage, was named Thomas Scot Eddy, and the mother received a purse from the passengers. Then the racing liner plunged into a south-easterly gale. Cabins were

flooded again, but Captain Travers was within sight of the record and would not ease down.

On the last day at sea everyone was talking about South Africa, and the diarist recorded that all the old hands spoke well of the country. "Some earn thirty pounds a month with no difficulty," he wrote.

On the last morning there was a fog, and a foghorn was heard. Then the mists rolled away and the "White Albatross" made her unexpected appearance in Table Bay, disturbing the Sunday lunch in many households. One newspaper stated: "A singular point about the passage is that on no full day at sea did she steam less than four hundred miles."

The Scot landed three hundred and seven passengers on that occasion.

Most of them travelled to Adderley St. in hansom-cabs, fare one shilling. A banquet was held at the Royal Hotel in Plein Street. Meanwhile the coal-eating Scot was being refuelled painfully by a cavalcade of mule wagons.

I mentioned the Scot in a previous book,¹¹ and one of my readers, Mrs. M. C. Armstrong of Uitenhage, wrote to me pointing out the admiration which this ship aroused in Cape Town. "Everyone wanted to see the record-breaker, but I was a child with an aching tooth, and first I had to go to the dentist," recalled Mrs. Armstrong. "The leading dentist of those days was Mr. Barclay of Queen Victoria Street. There were no injections, no painless extractions at that time. But my grandmother warned me that if I made any

¹¹ "South African Beachcomber."

fuss I would not be taken to see the *Scot*. That was enough! I was brave, the tooth came out, and then we drove down to the docks by hansom-cab.”

Reading that diary of the *Scot* on board the *Pendennis Castle*, I feel like a millionaire. It also reveals the transformation which has taken place in those parts of the mail ships where the lowest fares are paid. You could not feed a tourist class passenger on stewed steak and rice pudding nowadays, and there would be no customers for eight-berth cabins.

I was talking to a fellow passenger in the *Pendennis Castle* who had arrived in Cape Town in a bygone mail boat in which the third class passengers slept in hammocks. It was before the days of refrigeration, and salt pork was a daily item. That sort of travel has vanished like the sailing ships. When I

walk round the tourist class on board the *Pendennis Castle* I can see clearly enough that the lowest fare today gives the passenger a more comfortable voyage than many first class passengers of last century received for their money.

Whether you travel first or tourist you see the same new films, dance to the same orchestra, swim in open-air baths, take part in similar deck sports. When I think of Captain Travers fumbling with the magic-lantern I can only shake my head sadly. I never liked magic-lantern shows.

Chapter Twenty-Two

TRISTAN HOLDS A SECRET

FAR out in the gales and sunlight and clean air of the South Atlantic there is an island with a secret that all the doctors of the world and all the nations would love to share. The island is Tristan da Cunha, and the secret is long life and good health.

No doubt other islands can boast of their centenarians. People living in isolation may expect to avoid some of the plagues and ailments of the cities. But the Tristan record goes far beyond all others. It is as though the islanders live in a different world, a world almost entirely free from disease.

Early in my island travels I found myself, by a thousand to one chance, on Tristan's black volcanic beach. I was only twenty, but I was a reporter;

and on that ground I had wheedled a passage out of the captain of a cruiser. At intervals of years a cruiser was sent from Simonstown to Tristan with mail and stores. There was no other way of visiting the island. So I was more than lucky when I set foot on Tristan in 1920; and it was my good fortune to spend a few days there again in 1923, when the next mail reached the lonely island. Something would have burned within me all my life if I had not satisfied my urge to land on Tristan da Cunha when I was a young traveller.

Now my old restless spirit has been succeeded by the desire to solve the great medical mystery of the island. One of the first impressions of every visitor is the obvious good health which he encounters among young and old; and soon it becomes clear that extreme old age is regarded as the

natural heritage of every islander, and that this longevity holds no terrors. In other healthy parts of the world people now expect to pass seventy; but on Tristan the islanders (especially the women) are only elderly at seventy and are still active at ninety. I knew four island sisters who were even more remarkable examples of the Tristan longevity rule. One reached the age of one hundred and four; another was one hundred and two; the third ninety nine; while the fourth, the famous Betty Cotton, died at ninety four.

Doctors and dentists have examined the islanders from time to time, but no medical research team has even been able to stay long enough to solve the mystery. I went from house to house in 1923 with a senior naval surgeon who had been sent there specially to

report on the health of this strange little race and investigate the effects of inbreeding. (You have today more than two hundred people who are all descended from eight men and seven women.) The surgeon assured me that they had not suffered in any way, in spite of marriage after marriage between first cousins. But when he came to their splendid teeth and great ages he was baffled.

“The secret of longevity is here, if only I had long enough to study it,” that naval surgeon told me. “But what can I do in three days? I would need three years, and then I might still know very little.”

I have kept in touch with Tristan life ever since my two visits. John Hagan, an intelligent islander who settled in Cape Town at the end of last century, was my most useful informant. He

revisited his old home in the cruiser with me in 1923, and pointed out many details of island life which I would have missed. Hagan's own career was not without adventurous and dramatic episodes; and it would be well to visualise this character from the remote island who fitted into unfamiliar city ways and survived.

He was a tall, strong blond with blue eyes and a large fair moustache, completely different from the typical swarthy Tristan islander. Hagan arrived in Cape Town at the age of twenty-two just before the South African War, fought in that war, and then joined the tramway company as a motorman. The only wheeled vehicles he had known on the island had been ox-carts and wheelbarrows; yet he adapted himself to electricity and drove the old open tram-cars when

they were the fastest things on the road. He took me up Orange Street hundreds of times on my way home from school. Hagan went on pension after forty-three year's service, and died at the age of seventy-one. (His mother, true to the island tradition of long-lived women, was well over ninety when she died.) Hagan really brought Tristan's queer past to life when he talked to me. Some of my clues to the secrets of Tristan's miraculous health came from John Hagan.

I always wondered whether Hagan himself would not have lived much longer if he had remained on the island. It was a hard life in winter on the old tramcars, when the driver was lashed by rain day and night, with only a cape to keep out the water. I think it was civilisation that ended Hagan's

life at seventy-one. They burn an oil made from penguins in the lamps of Tristan, and those flickering rays might have been more restful for John Hagan than the electric headlights of Cape Town's trams.

One day I asked Hagan why the women lived longer than the men on Tristan. He pointed out that Tristan was no Utopia, and that sudden deaths had been common among the men on the island. Three of the first settlers had vanished, and had probably been murdered. A runaway whaler man who had spent eleven years on Tristan became raving mad and threw himself into the sea. A sailor, having been rescued from shipwreck, drank himself to death when a cask of rum drifted ashore. Another castaway wandered demented about the mountain for two

months, living mainly on seabirds'-eggs, and then died of exposure.

Hagan's own grandfather had gone down to the beach and cut his wrists, ending by suicide a long feud with the island headman. Several islanders had fallen to their deaths over the precipices that rise from the sea nearly all the way round the island. Sharks had accounted for one or two men. One man had died from internal injuries sustained while hunting wild goats on the mountain. A child had been carried away when a cloudburst on the mountain turned a village stream into a deadly flood. The child was swept into the sea and never seen again.

Most tragic of all was the boat disaster of 1885; not only a disaster but a deep mystery with a medical sequel. Fifteen men (thirteen of them married) went out to intercept a sailing ship in a

wooden whaler. This boat had been presented to them by the British Government not long before in recognition of the help Tristan had given to shipwrecked people, and it was more seaworthy than their own canvas boats. They had some livestock in the boat which they hoped to barter for flour and groceries.

Peter Green, the headman, watched through his telescope as they went alongside the barque. The ship stood out, and we could see our boat astern," he wrote. "She stood out about four miles. When she came in again she got so far to the eastward that she was lost to our view. We were watching for the boat all that night. Next morning two parties went round the island by land. They could see nothing of the boat."

No one ever saw that boat again. It was thought at first that the men had

been carried away in the ship, and the islanders were confident that they would see their menfolk again. When inquiries were made, however, the master of the barque (the *West Riding*) denied that the island boat had made contact with the ship. He could not explain the disappearance.

The sea was choppy that day, but the famous Tristan boatmen had often ventured out in much heavier weather. Peter Green was certain that he had seen them reach the ship. Perhaps the boat was overloaded with fifteen men and the livestock. Certainly all hands were drowned.

Hagan's father perished in that disaster. His mother lost three brothers. Only four adult males were left on the island, one of them a troublesome idiot. A number of people decided to abandon their island of

tragedy and settle in South Africa, and that was how the Hagans came to Cape Town.

Naturally, the Tristan people have never forgotten that disaster. If the men sail across to the smaller islands of the group for birds-eggs, if they are late in returning, the memory rises again and haunts the womenfolk.¹²

I said that the boat disaster had a medical sequel. By one of those unexplained wonders of nature, more boys than girls were born on the island, so that in the course of time the males and females struck a balance again. Nevertheless, you can understand why

¹² The boat tragedy was repeated in July 1959, when a fishing motorboat and six dinghies manned by fifteen Tristan islanders failed to return during heavy weather. A long search was unsuccessful. Note that in both these disasters the same number of men were lost.

there are more old women than old men in the Tristan story.

Hagan said that nothing ever went wrong with the women except occasional “convulsions”. I found out from the details he gave me that he meant a sort of hysteria, probably caused by the rigid moral code imposed on this narrow circle. Some of the afflicted women had religious visions. Nevertheless, visiting doctors have diagnosed the “convulsions” as a form of subconscious revolt against the code after the emotions have been long repressed. It is never serious. Women in other remote communities suffer from similar nervous symptoms.

Childbirth is not dreaded on Tristan, though it is seldom that skilled medical help is available. About eighty years ago a naval surgeon went through the island registers and

recorded the fact that only five babies born there had died in infancy. When I was there soon after World War I there was only one midwife, who had been taught by her mother, and who passed on her skill to two daughters. She had no antiseptics. Yet no Tristan child has ever died in childbirth, though a few have been born dead.

Some of you may agree with me, and many will surely disagree, when I say that one clue to Tristan longevity may be found in the fact that every child ever born there has been breast-fed. Moreover, the babies are not weaned until they have reached twelve or even sixteen months! No doubt this custom arose when milchcows became scarce. Many island children today have seldom tasted fresh milk since they were weaned.

Tristan has been an island of large families almost ever since the settlement was established. When the first clergyman arrived there over a century ago he found nine families with an average of seven children to a family.

Perhaps the most important event in Tristan medical history was the death of Corporal William Glass of the Royal Artillery, founder of the settlement. He lived to sixty-seven in spite of the malignant skin condition which slowly attacked his lip and face. *No case of cancer has been recorded on Tristan before Glass died in 1853, or since then.* So the great interest which this remote island possesses for the modern world is found not only in the long-lived people, but in their freedom from cancer. A recent expert search of the death registers which have been kept on the island since the early days

failed to reveal any suggestion of a fatal illness – apart from Glass – that might have been caused by cancer.

All the other killing diseases are also absent. A medical team which spent some weeks on Tristan not long before World War II examined the whole population, carried out blood tests and optical tests, and found they were dealing with the healthiest little race on earth. Not a sign of venereal disease, tuberculosis, arthritis, kidney complaints, or even dyspepsia.

Every doctor who has landed on Tristan has been impressed by the physique of men, women and children. Though the men are fairly tall, they do not resemble circus strong men. They are wiry rather than gigantic. Nearly every woman keeps a slim figure all her life. Feet are well-shaped and the absence of foot trouble is put down to

the comfortable ox-hide moccasins worn by all. Young men and women sometimes wrestle playfully; the incautious youth may find himself thrown heavily by a slip of a girl. Middle-aged men race up the steep mountain slopes with heavy sacks on their backs.

I think it is clear that Tristan is kind to those who do not take liberties with its heights and seas. Tristan men are rather too fond of handling heavy drums and barrels without proper care, and this sort of strain has resulted in a number of hernias. Yet the men go on lifting weights and rowing without trusses and without ever causing strangulation. The few old-fashioned trusses found on the island are heir-looms rather than useful medical aids.

Tristan eyesight is about the finest in the world. It would be interesting to

watch a contest between Tristanites and South African Bushman, for both races are phenomenal in this respect. The feat on Tristan which always astounds visitors from the outside world is the ability of the islanders to discern a ship on the horizon and then to describe the rig before a person with ordinary vision can see the ship at all. Tristan islanders are not excessive readers; and so they can read without glasses when they are old.

One of the clergymen who lived on Tristan shortly before World War II noted a sort of extra-sensory perception among the islanders. They seemed to know when a ship was going to call, and their excitement was communicated to the dogs of the settlement. All night before a ship reached the island the dogs would bark and howl continuously. During his years on the island

the clergyman had never known a false alarm.

When a ship reaches Tristan from any populated country, the islanders very soon begin suffering from colds.¹³ (A ship from the Antarctic does not infect the island, and this has been noted ever since the days of the American whalers.) Between ships, colds are unknown. An epidemic of colds soon dies out, for it seems that the germs must have fresh material to work on if they are to flourish, and they do not find it among the island people.

¹³ In September 1959 the ships *Tristania* and *Frances Repetto*, owned by the crawfish factory firm, arrived at the island with measles and mumps on board. Though the ships were placed under quarantine, some of the islanders caught the diseases. These were the first cases of measles ever known on the island. One islander died of measles, aged eighty-three.

Tristan has a bitter winter, but at least the rain and high winds do not cause colds.

Hagan told me that he never cleaned his teeth when he was on the island. He bought his first tooth-brush in Cape Town. No one, he declared, cleaned their teeth regularly on Tristan except the parson and his family – if there was a parson. Some people might scrub their teeth with a rag dipped in salt water before going to church on Sunday, but tooth-brushes and tooth-paste were almost unknown on the island.

This brings me to another of Tristan's physical wonders. The people have the finest teeth in the world. Only in recent years have dentists examined the islanders; in fact, I do not think more than half a dozen dentists have landed there. But one Norwegian

dentist took an X-ray plant and laboratory equipment with him. He made impressions and pictures of every mouth on the island, from newly-born babies to the nicotine-stained fangs of eighty-year-old Sam Swain. One mouth after another turned out to be free from decay, and he had to search meticulously to discover the tiniest cavities.

Only among the married women did this dentist find one case of deep, acute decay. A number of women told him that they had never experienced toothache until they became pregnant. Summing up, the dentist reported that half the people were entirely free from decay, a high percentage. When decay was observed, it occurred slowly and seldom went deep. Often a single tooth was affected, and the patient was unaware of it.

Sputum tests showed that one islander had the acid-forming *Bacillus acidophilus*. He was a man who had just returned after living in Cape Town for a year; and another test a few weeks later revealed that the bacillus had vanished. Gum diseases were rare. Nearly every adult showed tartar, but this had no ill-effect. The teeth, though yellowish, were strong and well-formed. Evidence regarding pyorrhoea is conflicting. A dentist who called at Tristan about six years before the Norwegian claimed to have found two cases, but neither of the afflicted islanders had been born on the island.

Fine teeth and splendid health depend to a certain extent on diet. I was going to say "a large extent"; but here the robust Tristan islanders have provided medical science with yet another problem and it is impossible to be

dogmatic. Let us now survey the queer food resources of the island and then study the Tristan physique again. It is a monotonous diet of fish and potatoes. Many items make up the complete list, but it is a fact that the Tristan people would have to abandon their island or starve to death if they lost that staple diet of fish and potatoes.

Spring each year brings the small vegetable crop; turnips and cabbages, carrots and onions. Apples are picked at this time, but they are always sour because the rats take them if they are left to ripen on the trees. Early potatoes are dug before Christmas, and that is the time when some people allow themselves the luxury of killing a sheep. Expeditions visit the far side of the island and shoot wild cattle. From January to April the menu of

fish and potatoes is varied by mollymauks from the mountain, fat little albatross chicks.

Do not live on Tristan from April to August because the diet of fish and potatoes reigns supreme. During grim periods in the island story, when potato crops were disappointing and the weather was too rough for fishing, the Tristanites knew hungry winters.

August and September are the egg months, when albatross, penguin and other seabirds eggs are collected by the thousand on Nightingale and Inaccessible, the other islands of the group. About twenty thousand petrels are killed for meat, and some are used for cooking fat. Penguins are seldom eaten but, as I have said, their fat keeps the island's lamps alight.

Tristan has not much else to offer. Fowls and geese are kept, not so much for the table as for trading when ships call. (Even a set of Tristan teeth is hard put to it to cope with these tough birds.) An indigenous berry, similar to the cranberry, grows in the gulches round the coast, but that is a long way to go for a pie.

Salt has been made on Tristan from sea water. It is now easily available in the store; but the cooks used little or no salt when I was there and I am told that the food is still as tasteless as ever. Salt was never used in the past to preserve fish, seabirds or meat. Much sorely-needed food went bad in the summer for this reason, but I am not convinced that the loss was harmful. If the islanders owe their good health in part to fresh and wholesome food, then

the absence of salt products need not be regretted.

Wild celery and wild mustard are gathered and used in soups. "Island tea" (*Chenopodium tomentosum*) makes a beverage which is brewed when imported tea is scarce.

Nowadays there is a shop on the island. The islanders work in the crawfish export industry every summer, and so they are able to buy those commodities from the outside world which were once looked upon as rare treats. This may be an interlude, or it may mean a new way of life for Tristan. It does not enter into the Tristan medical mystery, because generations of these long-lived, healthy people grew up in the days when flour and sugar, tea and coffee were luxuries.

You do not have to be a dietician to see that the old, traditional Tristan menu lacked many items which are regarded in civilisation as essential. Butter, for example, is seldom made on Tristan. Vitamins and mineral salts are missing, while carbohydrates and phosphates are only too plentiful. No wheat is grown, so that in the past the islanders went for months on end without bread. They went hungry, too, but they did not die. The lack of so-called "essentials" did not even cause rickets or scurvy.

Dentists agree that teeth suffer if "hard tack" is avoided, yet the Tristan diet is almost entirely soft. Babies are given boiled mutton bones to chew when they are cutting their teeth, but they soon begin the soft fish and potato regime.

I would not be giving you the whole Tristan picture if I left out those complaints which are not unknown in the settlement. You have heard about the colds. Mumps appeared once last century and again this century. Dysentery is a well-deserved summer complaint, for the islanders are careless about hygiene and they have never thought about a fly campaign.

Doctors have found one duodenal ulcer on Tristan, and only one. This man had spent fifteen years away from the island. Civilisation had also raised his blood pressure, whereas untraveled Tristanites of seventy revealed pressures far below their years.

Even on Tristan there is no escape from the hereditary effects of allergies. One of the first English settlers, and two of the first wives from St. Helena, brought allergies with them; and so for

nearly a century and a half the asthma and migraine, catarrh and excema have been handed down.

Ben Swain, a man with deformed arms, must have put the idea of degeneration through intermarriage into the minds of many visitors. Ben was a shepherd and cattle-watcher, and this work he did well. I found him to be a cheerful fellow, not at all backward mentally, whistling as he worked. He suffered from fits occasionally, yet even this man, far below the average Tristan physique, lived to a good old age.

I expected to find many hereditary disabilities as a result of so much intermarriage. This is another of Tristan's surprises. My friend the naval surgeon was positive that no signs of degeneration had appeared. If the parents are of healthy stock, he

pointed out, their offspring should not only be free from any tendency to disease, but they will inherit accumulated tendencies to good health. Tristan islanders are physically above the average, especially the children. But they are shy, their faces are certainly not animated, and some visitors have mistaken these signs for dullness of intellect. Once their reserve has been overcome they are found to be intelligent, kindly and courteous.

Only one islander in five could read and write at that period (1923), and so their vocabulary was small. Their ideas of the outside world were hazy, but in their own island circle they were bright enough. Their skill in building and handling boats has always been admired by expert seamen, and this art is not acquired by idiots.

Augustus Earle, an English artist and naturalist, seems to have been the first visitor to comment on the healthiness of Tristan. He spent eight months there in 1824, after the ship that had landed him had been driven away by a gale. Earle noted in his diary "the wonderful effects of exercise and temperance". The food was coarse, they never saw bread, milk and potatoes were the standing dishes, fish when they had the chance and flesh when they could bring down a goat. "Yet I enjoy the soundest sleep," Earle wrote. "Captains of ships have offered these people medicine chests, but they refused on the ground that no one was ever sick."

Peter Green the Hollander who ruled Tristan wisely for half a century, had a medicine chest and treated the islanders when they needed help. He stated

that the original medicines were drawn upon so rarely that twenty years passed before the chest had to be refilled. Peter Green died early this century at the age of ninety-four.

It must be admitted that the Tristan way of life has not always suited the missionaries who worked there. Mrs. Barrow, wife of the clergyman who spent three years on Tristan early this century, wrote of her husband just after they had left: "Poor Graham is much run down and looks as though he had put on twenty years."

Then there was my friend, the Rev. Henry Martyn Rogers, who had completed one year on the island when I called in 1923, and who spent two more years before he could find a ship to take him away. His baby (born on Tristan) and his wife both flourished there, but it was a grim period in the

island's history and poor Rogers died soon after he returned to England. I am convinced that the hardships of exile on Tristan were responsible for his untimely death. During the last year nearly everyone suffered from the food shortage. One day Mrs. Rogers wrote in her diary: "Today we had dinner, tea and supper all in one, at five o'clock. The children of the island haunt any kitchen where a meal is preparing, and I do not blame them."

Yet those who knew hunger on Tristan also loved the lonely island and wished to see it again. In one of his last public lectures, Martyn Rogers declared: "The rushing of the Atlantic waves is still in my ears, while I can still smell the kelp on the beach, and can see those eager, tear-stained faces pleading for our return – for my heart is ever there and I hope I may yet be

able to return to the little island flock I love so well.”

Tristan still holds its secret. I cannot tell you why the underfed islanders, living in their damp climate and disobeying many conventional rules of health, should have become the healthiest people on earth. Diet and climate, daily habits and housing, lack of infection and heredity, all fit into a mysterious pattern. Such a known and simple health rule as occasional fasting may be even more powerful in lengthening the life span than we imagine. Natural food without dubious additions must enter into the picture. It may well be that more highly-civilised people are not eating fresh fish and potatoes often enough. I must also point out that Tristan has no local brew; it has never had any alcohol worth mentioning; there are few

smokers; and these are factors which cannot be overlooked.

Finally there is the island itself, for the famous loneliest island in the world must exert some influence. A homesick islander seemed to me to approach the heart of the mystery more closely than any of the visiting doctors. I first met this man, Tom Rogers, on the island. Later on I came to know him better in Cape Town; for he left home at intervals of years to go into hospital and have a varicose ulcer of the left leg treated; the only ailment of that kind to appear on the island. Tom Rogers also had the only set of false teeth, which he displayed with pride to those who had never seen such marvels.

He was an old man when he left Cape Town for the last time. He knew civilisation well enough, but he, too,

was pining for that volcano in mid-ocean, that bone-chilling peak in the clouds and the potato fields and thatched cottage which he called home. His leg had not healed properly, but he was anxious to go. I wanted to know more, I longed to hear the Tristan secret, and so I pressed old Tom Rogers to tell me why he was going. So he spoke at last: "In the city 'ere it's arl noise an' rush, an' heavy clothes – aye, an' you-all eat mawnin' an' aft'noon an hevening. You arx me why I'm goin back to the hisland? I carn't live long in the city, mister – I'm goin' back to the hisland fer good.'



Chapter Twenty-Three

ISLE OF DEAD SHIPS

IN days of sail the Tristan da Cunha islanders became famous for their bravery in rescuing shipwrecked crews. Many sailing ships passed the peak of Tristan to check their chronometers, and some called at this “larder of the South Atlantic” after months at sea for fresh meat and vegetables. Thirteen sailing ships were lost on the Tristan group last century.

The hospitality shown by the islanders to survivors brought them honours and

awards: a signed portrait of Queen Victoria, gold watches, cash and stores. After the wreck of the *Allan-shaw* the British Government sent a gift of £100 to Tristan. This was the strangest disaster of all.

Not that the other shipwrecks lacked drama. (I shall have something to say later about the *Blenden Hall* and her little treasure.) A great Tristan life-saver for half a century was Peter Green, the Hollander I have mentioned. He was shipwrecked there himself in the schooner *Emily* and remained to become the patriarch and ruler of the island. Under his guidance the islanders risked their lives and shared their last crusts with castaways. One crew had to be fed for nearly a year before they were taken away.

In the Hagan home on Tristan I saw the name-board of the American ship

Mabel Clark forming part of the panelling over the fireplace. One of her crew married a daughter of Peter Green; and indeed shipwrecks supplied almost the only fresh blood in this little community. No wonder so many Tristan children were named after ships that had come to grief there! The bells that call the Tristan islanders to church are the bells of the *Mabel Clark*.

Rats came to Tristan when the *Henry B. Paul* was wrecked in the 'eighties of last century. Those rats have impoverished the island. They also brought the ferocious fleas which sent me, and the naval chaplain, to the cruiser's sick bay for ointment after the ordeal of nights on shore. It was suspected that the *Henry B. Paul* and another ship, the *Edward Vittery*, were run aground at Tristan for the

insurance money. However, the ordinary hazards of the sea were such that four large sailing ships were lost on the Tristan group between 1870 and 1872.

The loss of the *Allanshaw* was different from all the others. One of her crew, an able seaman named Paddy Saunders, settled in Cape Town. He had been in three shipwrecks within two years, and he would go to sea no more. I owe the story of the *Allanshaw* to Saunders; while the sequel formed another of the experiences of my old islander friend John Hagan.

The *Allanshaw* was a full-rigged iron ship of sixteen hundred tons, one of James Nourse's "coolie ships". She sailed out of Liverpool in February 1893, bound for India with a cargo of salt; and as a rule she picked up

indentured Indian labourers at Calcutta and carried them to Natal, Mauritius and other places. But this was the last voyage of a fine ship. She was classed 100 A1 at Lloyd's; she had a full crew of real seamen; and she was doomed.

She was doomed because her thirty-year-old Irish master, Captain A. C. Thomson, was a madman. No one knew that when the *Allanshaw* sailed. It was not long, however, before everyone realised that Thomson was a hermit. He talked to Stewart Waters, the mate, and the other two officers only to ask questions or give orders, and rarely did he speak to any of the men before the mast. When the *Allanshaw* reached the open sea he came on deck once a day at noon with his sextant to fix the position.

Paddy Saunders found that three men in the fo'c'stle held masters' certifi-

cates, while two others had served as officers. Several of them owned sextants, and they annoyed the master and mates by working out the ship's position from time to time.

Saunders also remembered that five seamen squinted. Old sailor men regarded even one cross-eyed shipmate as unlucky; five were deadly. In addition, an apprentice named Roberts chanced to remark that every ship he had sailed in had been wrecked. So the *Allanshaw* had more than enough Jonahs to sink her.

"I could see that the captain was worried about something, but I only found out what it was later," Saunders told me. "He never talked to me. I studied him during my trick at the wheel, however, and his abnormal state of mind was obvious." Thirty days out, and the captain's madness

became a little more plain. He ordered the men to remove all equipment from the lifeboats – masts and sails, oars and rudders, water and food. Everything was stowed away below and the boats were swung inboard and lashed securely.

On the morning of March 23 the peak of Tristan was sighted dead ahead, and the fine ship *Allanshaw* raced towards the island at twelve knots with all sail set. At two that afternoon the *Allanshaw* was still heading for the island. All hands, with the possible exception of the master, knew that she was too close for safety.

One of the seamen who held a master's certificate went to the wheel at two that afternoon. He tried to edge away from the island, altering course to the south'ard from time to time when the captain went below. But the

captain had a tell-tale compass in his cabin, and soon he ran up the ladder shouting: "Damn you, keep her on her course."

Some of the men went to Waters, the mate, and begged him to take charge of the ship before it was too late. Waters was a careful Scot, a married man with a family. He was afraid to make the move which might have lost him not only his job but his certificate. How often in the history of the sea has a mate taken it upon himself to lock up his captain and take command of the ship?

So all hands stood waiting for the end of the *Allanshaw*, and most of them must have felt their hearts beating faster. Until the last moment they hoped that the captain would give the order to alter course, but never a word did he utter. At two forty five that

afternoon the captain went below and Waters called to the helmsman: "Mind your helm, we're getting close to the land." "Helm coming up, sir," called the man at the wheel.

Even then the ship might have been saved; but at that moment the captain returned on deck, sent Waters for'ard, and put the ship back on her course for destruction. Next moment the ship grated, jarred and struck heavily. "Let go all sheets and halyards," yelled the mad captain.

She remained fast, listing, with the seas breaking over her. "Get the boats away," the captain ordered.

This was no easy matter in view of the state of the boats. They cut the lashings away, however, and one lifeboat and the gig were launched at last.

Captain Thomson sat by himself in a damaged boat with his arms folded. "Come on, sir – jump for it," Waters shouted to him. "We'll pick you up."

"Never mind me – save yourselves," called back the captain. Soon afterwards a sea struck the boat and the captain was washed overboard and drowned.

Twenty-six men were now afloat in the two boats in a rough sea. They had no oars, thanks to the captain, but they tore up the bottom-boards and paddled away from the ship. Roberts, the "Jonah" apprentice, an able seaman named McDonald, another seaman and the sail maker, were clinging to the mizzen rigging. Evidently they thought they were safer there than in the lifeboats, and hoped the boats would return for them when the sea was calm.

That afternoon several islanders, including seventeen-year-old John Hagan, were gathering penguin eggs from the Cave Point rookeries. They saw the *Allanshaw* strike, and watched two boats making for the line of surf. Hurrying down to the shore, the islanders were in time to point out the safest landing place. One boat upset in the surf, and the exhausted men would have been drowned if the islanders had not rushed into the sea and dragged them out of the breakers. John Hagan found that he had saved the life of young George Collis, third mate.

Soon afterwards the *Allanshaw* broke her back, snapped in two amidships and sank. Part of the mizzen mast still jutted above the surface with the four men who had remained on board.

They were in great danger. Two of them, a seaman Bompach and the sail

maker, swam for the shore and were hauled out of the surf more dead than alive. At daybreak the sea was a little calmer and the islanders ventured out to the wreck in one of their canvas boats. They picked up a few cases of stores, but saw nothing of the seaman McDonald and the “Jonah” apprentice Roberts. The mizzen had gone during the night, taking the two men who had been clinging to it.

So the survivors pulled round to the Tristan settlement with the islanders and were taken into the homes of the fifty people living there at that time. Peter Green, the ruler, celebrated his eighty-fifth birthday while they were there. George Collis was given shelter by John Hagan’s mother. Collis and Hagan became inseparable.

Fortunately the Cape station flagship, H.M.S. *Raleigh*, had called a few days

before and left a good supply of tea, cocoa, coffee, flour and other groceries which the islanders could not produce. Food was more plentiful in those days, for although the rats had arrived, there were fewer mouths to feed. Paddy Saunders, who stayed with Betty Cotton, spoke to me fondly of the shredded crawfish fried in butter, and the potatoes mashed in milk and butter, served in that household.

“Money, liquor, tobacco and swear-words were all unknown among the deeply religious Tristan islanders while we were there,” Saunders recalled. “Some of the girls were so shy that I was never able to talk to them the whole time I was on the island.”

Early in April the barque *Clan Ferguson* appeared off the island.

Waters, as the senior officer, intercepted her and asked for a passage. His request was refused, and the master would do nothing more than accept letters. Two weeks later the Italian barque *Beppo* was intercepted. Again the captain sailed on without the *Allanshaw's* survivors.

“I suppose they took us for a gang of pirates,” commented Paddy Saunders. “The Italians threw two of our fellows into the sea and cut the boat painter. We were a wild looking crowd by that time-bearded and in rags.”

However, a humanitarian captain was on the way. He was master of the German barque *Theodore*, and he agreed at once to take the whole crew. The men had been on Tristan for three months.

Two of the *Allanshaw's* mates decided to remain on Tristan. One of them, G. H. Cartwright, married one of the Hagan girls and stayed on Tristan for a year before bringing his wife to Cape Town. The other officer who had come to love the lonely island was George Collis; and he, too, lived on Tristan until Cartwright and his wife left.

But that was not the end of the story. An inquiry into the loss of the *Allanshaw* was held in Cape Town, with Mr. P. Nightingale presiding and Captain M. H. Penfold as nautical assessor. Waters told the court that he had read the sailing directions and knew that it was not safe to approach within two miles of the southern shore of Tristan. He had warned Captain Thomson that he was going in too close, but his words were disregarded.

"I did not speak again because the captain was a difficult man who disliked interference," Waters declared. The court found that there was nothing to show that Captain Thomson of the *Allanshaw* was not sober. "Unhappily the disaster resulted in the loss of his own life and two of the crew, besides the total destruction of a fine ship and cargo," the magistrate went on. "The loss was due to a very great error of judgment on the part of the master. The first mate, seeing that the ship was close to the shore, should have remonstrated with the master. However, the court considers that this admonition is sufficient."

Apparently no one felt like informing the court that Captain Thomson was suffering from some mental disease when he sailed the *Allanshaw*

deliberately on to the rocks of Tristan. One secret which never reached the court was revealed to me by Paddy Saunders. He went round to the scene of the wreck several weeks afterwards with some islanders who were anxious to see whether anything useful had drifted ashore.

“I found a waterproof wallet containing a portrait of a girl and some letters she had written to Captain Thomson – among them a letter breaking off her engagement to him,” Saunders told me. “It seemed that no good purpose would be served by keeping the letters and I burnt them on the spot.”

So that was the secret of Captain Thomson’s madness. One more sequel to the wreck of the *Allanshaw* rounds off this weird story. John Hagan, you will remember, landed in Cape Town towards the end of last century,

knowing nothing of the world outside the lonely island. “I had five pounds in my pocket and a lot of hope in my heart,” Hagan informed me. “I had no friends in Cape Town, but I knew that I had a staunch friend in George Collis, wherever he might be.”

Collis went back to sea and sailed as master in a number of ships. Strange to say, he called only once at the Cape, and then his friend John Hagan was away up-country. Nevertheless, they kept in touch for more than half a century. Collis sent presents which were treasured by Hagan – a set of whale’s teeth, a walking stick and other things. “I shall never forget the kindness you and your mother showed me,” Collis wrote.

Collis settled at Westgate-on-Sea in England when he retired. He often talked to his friends of Tristan, and

planned to revisit the island in a small yacht. This scheme had to be abandoned, however, owing to ill-health. Shortly before his death in 1947 Collis wrote to his old friend John Hagan: "I want to leave you something to remember me by."

Hagan was in bed with heart trouble, an old man living with difficulty on a small pension. He had the doctor's bills to meet, and he was worried about the money he still owed on his house at Woodstock.

Then came news of the death of Collis, the friend of his youth. Later there arrived a letter from a lawyer. Poor old John Hagan had inherited fifteen hundred pounds.

That was the end of the story of the *Allanshaw*, fifty-five years after Hagan

had risked his life in the Tristan surf and made a lifelong friend.

Chapter Twenty-Four

ATLANTIC TREASURE ISLES

TRISTAN DA CUNHA is a treasure isle. I have heard of other legendary hoards on islands in the North and South Atlantic; and more money has been spent on treasure hunting, I believe, than the isles have ever yielded. But you never know. Wise men do not talk about the wealth they have uncovered.

It is a game that grips all sorts of people. I know that Sir Ernest Shackleton and Frank Worsley hoped to find pirates' treasure on a South Atlantic isle during their last expedition in the *Quest*. Shackleton, like others before him, was also interested in the "white gold" called guano on the Tristan islands.

Shackleton's *Quest* called at the Salvage Islands, owned by Portugal, a

little uninhabited group sighted by many thousands of South African mail boat passengers between Madeira and the Canaries. Though many see them, few realise the money and toil devoted at various times to the search for treasure on the islands. I saw these volcanic fragments at such close range that I could pick out through the glasses the small craters made in the sand by parties of treasure hunters. Shipmasters give the Salvages a wide berth as a rule, for the three islands are fringed with a thousand rocks and reefs.

An old and remarkable adventurer named Senhor Afonso Coelho of Funchal, Madeira, gave me the untold story of the Salvages and the treasure. He knew the Salvages intimately, and his father had spent two months digging for the hoard. "My father lost

plenty of money there, but I shall tell you how I made a profit,” Afonso Coelho promised me.

Coelho was a blue-eyed, stocky, alert man of more than seventy when I met him beside the Funchal harbour a few years ago. His father was Portuguese, his mother Welsh, and he spoke English with a Welsh lilt. As a boy he left home to join the British steam yacht *Morning*, bound on a scientific expedition to the Antarctic. When he returned, he served the Blandy firm at Funchal for more than forty years, coaling the ships offshore and taking charge of tugs. He was decorated by the British Government during World War II for rescuing survivors of British ships which had been sunk by German raiders.

I regard Coelho as a most reliable informant, and thus I was deeply

interested when he declared that the Salvage group may have been the hiding place of more than one treasure. Apparently the search began soon after Captain Kidd had been hanged in 1701 at Execution Dock in London. Evidence at his trial gave some idea of his movements; and details of the ships he looted (including the treasure of the *Quedah Merchant*) suggested that he must have buried a large fortune somewhere.

Kidd's own logbook stated that the treasure had been lost at sea, but no one believed such an obvious piece of fiction. Cocos Island in the Pacific and Long Island near New York have been mentioned as Kidd's treasure islands. One of Kidd's crew, however, made a statement fixing one of the Salvages as the correct spot.

Which one? The group lies about one hundred and fifty miles south of Madeira, and there are three islands. Salvage Grande is a rough quadrangle about one mile each way with a peak, a hill and basalt columns. Great Piton is smaller and undulating; while Little Piton is a tiny outcrop shaped like a leg-of-mutton.

Lord Bexley, the influential English politician and financial expert, persuaded the First Lord of the Admiralty in 1813 to send H.M.S. *Prometheus* to the Salvage group. It seems unlikely that such a man would have been acting merely on rumours or the sort of bogus faded chart hawked about by swindlers. However, the bluejackets who landed with probes and spades found nothing. Captain Hercules Robinson, R.N., who was in charge of this expedition, reported that

Portuguese fisherman had found two chests of silver dollars some time before he arrived.

Captain Robinson visited the Salvages again in the middle of last century, having organised a treasure expedition of his own. He anchored his small yacht where the *Prometheus* had waited; but he found the island beaches greatly changed and again he had no luck. Robinson made inquiries at Tenerife about the treasure, and he was informed that a Liverpool syndicate had spent three months on Great Piton and had taken about £20,000 away with them.

That great treasure hunter, yachtsman and war correspondent E. F. Knight called at the Salvages in his famous *Alerte*. That was in 1889, when he was on his way to the treasure hunt on South Trinidad which he described so

well. Knight spent four days on Great Piton, working hard without reward. A later party is said to have found a skeleton with a copper coin of King George III of England.

There is no doubt that the German gunboat *Panther* landed a working party on Great Salvage in 1911, for the men were sighted and reported by a British liner. It was a period of international tension as a result of the “Agadir incident,” and the liner’s captain reported what he had seen. Nothing was done at the time. Soon after war was declared in 1914, however, Admiral Stoddart was sent to search the Salvages for a supposed German ammunition dump and buried guns. He found nothing, and so it was surmised that the *Panther* had really been seeking treasure.

Madeira fishermen who know the Salvages believe that the treasure of *El Corsero* (Kidd) was lifted long ago by poachers from the Canary Islands. Others think that the tides of more than two centuries have swept away the beaches of the islands, and that the treasure was lost with the sand.

My friend Coelho has an open mind on all these matters. He said that his father had heard of Kidd’s treasure, but that he was following clues to an entirely different hoard.

“It all started when a lawyer who lived next door to us found an account of the treasure in manuscript in a Madrid library,” began Coelho. “Long after Captain Kidd’s time a pirate ship intercepted a treasure-laden vessel from Mexico, and it was decided to bury some of the loot on Little Piton. I think this occurred early last century.

Some of the crew were hiding the treasure when a westerly gale blew up and the ship was driven away. The men on the waterless island must soon have died from thirst. The ship was wrecked on the Saharan coast, and the men were taken inland as prisoners by the Arabs. One of the seamen wrote an account of their adventures and drew a plan which found its way into the Madrid library at last.

“Manuel Gonzalves of Funchal heard the story from the lawyer and went to the islands in his yacht. He dug up Little Piton, and I saw his trenches when I went there with my father not long afterwards. My father carried on the work for two months with sixty Spaniards as labourers, but without finding anything.

“There is only one beach on Little Piton, and if anything was buried on

that island it must have been left under the sand on the beach. All the rest of the island is rocky, and it would be difficult to find a hiding place. In northerly gales the whole island is swept by the sea. I believe an expedition has been to Little Piton with metal-detecting instruments since World War II, but I could not find out what happened.”

Coelho thought the most likely place for hidden treasure on the Salvages would be the cave facing eastwards and twenty feet above high-water mark on Salvage Grande. The cave is disguised by the face of the rock, and you cannot detect the mouth until you are close to it. “That cave is exactly like a cathedral, but I think the pirates knew the place,” remarked Coelho.

I said that the Salvages were uninhabited, and I mentioned the fact

that Coelho had made money there. Coelho leased the three islands from 1937 to 1942 and took working parties there each year in a schooner to kill and salt the cagaras which nest there. The cagaras are shearwaters, also known as mutton-birds, and there is a great demand for them in the Madeira countryside. Coelho's crew of sixteen men plucked and salted down twenty-seven thousand cagaras during one winter season on Salvage Grande. The men lived for months on bread and fish, mealie meal porridge and sweet potatoes, with wine on Sundays. They collected feathers for beds; they pickled tons of limpets for sale in the Funchal market; they quarried the valuable bottle-green lime of the island; they dug tons of guano from the bird roosts.

That was Coelho's treasure. Zoologists have also found the riches they sought on these islands; mice without tails; the small dark, wild rabbits which were studied by Darwin and wrongly identified as a newly-evolved race; and the breeding grounds of such interesting birds as the Mediterranean shearwater, largest of the species in Atlantic waters.

Coelho thinks the Spanish poachers who come over from Lanzarote lifted any treasure there may have been on Little Piton. He found the poachers there once. "Very poor people – fishermen," Coelho recalled. "The four men looked like pirates themselves, the women were in rags and most of the twenty children with them were naked. They were living on limpets, fish, the Canary Island maize dish called gofio, and rabbit. A hungry

lot, I tell you, and if there was any treasure near the surface they would not miss it.”

For several decades last century Tristan de Cunha was the stronghold in which a genuine treasure of £35,000 in gold and notes was stored. It was in 1864, during the American Civil War, that the brig *Lark* was run aground deliberately on Tristan and scuttled. Captain Howard Summers, her owner and master, was a Northerner, and he had been pursued by a Southern commerce raider. So he decided to lose his ship and save the money on board.

Summers and C. A. Henderson, the mate, managed to get the money chest on shore without the crew becoming aware of the fortune in their midst. The money had been earned honestly in the course of many trading ventures.

It was buried in a cave on the far side of Tristan, some distance from the settlement. Before long the ship's company of the *Lark* were taken off by a passing ship. Captain Summers did not care to disclose the secret of the money-chest at that difficult period; and he died before he could recover it.

Henderson the mate, the only man in possession of the secret, waited for years before he could find anyone to supply him with a ship and finance the recovery of the money. Towards the end of last century, however, Henderson sailed for Tristan in the schooner *Rover* and returned with the money.

This interesting venture did not escape the notice of the waterfront reporters. A son of Captain Summers came to light and sued Henderson for a share. A report of the court proceedings appeared in the “Nautical Magazine”

in April 1901. Summers was awarded £17,500.

Tristan's old and famous treasure, the huge copper kettle filled with golden coins and silver plate, has been responsible for much digging at intervals for a century and a half. This is the hoard supposed to have been hidden by Jonathan Lambert of Salem, U.S.A., first permanent Tristan settler. Lambert went sealing and made a thousand gallons of oil during the 1811 season alone. He killed fur seals, too, in the seasons when they hauled up by the hundred on the Tristan beaches. And he sold fresh meat to ships at that busy period when scores of New Bedford whalers could be seen in a day among the Tristan islands. Lambert must have made money, though it is impossible to estimate how much he made.

Some say that Lambert had been a pirate, and that he brought a fortune to Tristan with him. This is unlikely. An announcement which Lambert made to the world, through the *Boston Gazette*, after landing on Tristan in 1810, does not suggest that he was a wealthy man at that time. "I intend to prepare a home where I can enjoy life without the embarrassments which have hitherto constantly attended me, and remain beyond the reach of chicanery and ordinary misfortune," Lambert declared.

It seems almost incredible now, but I first heard of Lambert's treasure from a man named William Cotton, whose father Alexander had served under Nelson in the *Victory* at Trafalgar. Alexander Cotton had visited Tristan while the British garrison was there in 1816, and had joined the little settle-

ment founded by Corporal William Glass of the Royal Artillery.

Lambert had two companions when he took possession of Tristan :an Italian named Thomaso Corri and one Andrew Millet. But when the British arrived, Lambert and Millet had vanished. Corri was the only survivor of the original settlement, and he had been joined by a young Spaniard known as Pancho, who was a runaway sailor. Corri reported that Lambert and Millet had gone fishing in a dinghy one day and had never been seen again. According to Corri, they must have been drowned. But according to the island legend, Corri had murdered the pair of them to secure Lambert's treasure. Pancho could throw no light on the matter because he had settled on the island after the disappearance of Lambert and Millet.

William Cotton told me the story and made it all seem like yesterday. His father had often described to him the military canteen where Cape brandy and wine were sold to the white soldiers and seamen and the fifty Hottentots of the garrison. "Corri always boasted to my father of his money, and declared that he would leave it to the man of the garrison who pleased him most," William Cotton recalled. "The treasure could not have been hidden far from the settlement, because Corri did not take long to fetch his gold coins when he needed money. Of course the island was covered in bush at that time, and though many soldiers tried to follow Corri, no one ever tracked him to the place where the copper kettle was hidden. But my father said the kettle must have been lying in the black sand

on the cliff above Little Beach, between the two waterfalls. From what my father told me, I think it must be fairly close to the cottage where my sister Betty Cotton once lived – the last house in the village at that time, if you were going down to the beach.”

How much money did Lambert leave? Some of the islanders talk in thousands, but no one knows. However, a vague statement which Corri often made in his cups has been passed down. “If I spent a pound every day of my life I could not get rid of my fortune,” Corri laughed as he bought drinks for the garrison. He may have been a murderer. Certainly he was an open-handed man with plenty of money to spend.

Corri burst a blood vessel and died before he could reveal the hiding place. A great search was made, but

not a spade or pick struck the great copper kettle.

By sheer chance I came upon a document not long ago giving a few more details of the Tristan treasure. It was a private journal kept by Midshipman William Burnaby Greene, R.N. of H.M.S. *Falmouth* at the time when Tristan was abandoned by the British garrison, and I found it in the British Museum library.

“Barracks had been erected, batteries built, sentries posted on the heights, so that the island had the appearance of a regular garrisoned fortress,” Greene wrote. “Yet after twelve months the island was given up to its fate and left to seek new masters.

“Three men remained behind and are probably there at this moment. Their probably inducement was to look for a

sum of money which it was supposed Currie (Corri) had amassed and buried, according to his custom. It is very improbable that the sum exceeded one hundred dollars and it is still more improbable that they should ever find it.”

Unfortunately the midshipman did not state whether his opinions were based on facts. Some of the islanders say that Pancho knew where the kettle was hidden and took it with him when he left the island. There is also a theory that the treasure has remained undiscovered because it was buried deeply when landslides occurred long ago.

A party of treasure hunters in 1821 unearthed Cori's skeleton. They were the passengers of the ill-fated *Blenden Hall*, passing the time until a ship picked them up. I shall come to the *Blenden Hall* treasure very soon. Corri

objected to his remains being disturbed. Tristan islanders declare that his ghost still haunts the scene on stormy nights – the only ghost the lonely island has ever known.

William Cotton obviously knew more about the treasure than the present Tristan islanders. He left Tristan with his family in the eighteen-seventies, made a new home in Simonstown, and earned his living by whaling and fishing. William Cotton died in 1925 at the age of eighty-three. His son George, born on Tristan, a famous harpooner in his day, was still alive in April 1960 at the age of ninety. Tristan gave those two its most famous treasure, good health even beyond four score years.

As a boy William Cotton sailed across from Tristan to Inaccessible Island every year. They used canvas boats

and prayed for calm weather during the passage of eighteen miles of open water. Inaccessible is also a treasure isle, and William Glass recalled the hours he had spent there searching for the money and jewellery lost after the wreck of the East India Company's ship *Blenden Hall*.

This was one of the classic shipwrecks, of course, and all students of sea literature know the details recorded by an army officer named Greig. He was forced to write on old newspapers with ink made from penguin blood, and his journal was all the more vivid for it.

The *Blenden Hall* drove on to Inaccessible in dense fog, slammed down on the beach by a huge roller and shattered. All but two men landed safely. They recovered food, canvas and many other useful articles from

the wreck. Some of the huge spars and timbers are still lying high up on the north-west shore. However, life in the camp of the castaways was made hideous by the quarrels of two women and the behaviour of the crew. The seamen had been released from discipline by the wreck; they knew there would be no more pay coming to them; and so they emptied the kegs of liquor that drifted ashore and robbed the passengers.

A doctor named McLennon found his trunk undamaged. It was stolen later by the seamen. Lieut. John Pepper of the East India Company's marine service lost a gold chronometer, money and jewellery which he valued at hundreds of pounds. The castaways were rescued by Tristan islanders after three months of great hardship on Inaccessible; but the missing jewell-

ery, money and other articles were never recovered. It seems probable that the sailors realised they would be searched and hid their loot on Inaccessible.

Among the *Blenden Hall* passengers was a woman who never forgot the kindness of the Tristan islanders after the rescue. Her son, the Rev. J. G. Barrow, was so moved by the story of the islanders' hospitality that he decided to work on Tristan as a missionary. Eighty-four years after the *Blenden Hall* wreck he reached Tristan with his wife and served there for three years.

One treasure expedition to the South Atlantic isles early this century ended with a trial at the Old Bailey. This was Captain Thomas Kerry's enterprise in

the small steam yacht *Pandora*, which sailed from England in 1904.

Kerry was after treasure in any form, including the "white gold" I have mentioned, the guano found on the Tristan group and on Gough Island. He had an official permit from the British authorities to remove guano, on condition that he delivered mails and stores at Tristan free of charge. The newspapers announced the date of *Pandora's* departure, and that brought an avalanche of Bibles, newspapers and other literature besides gifts of food and clothing.

I have seen this avalanche myself, and it has to be seen to be believed. Tristan islanders have enough Bibles and religious works to last them for centuries. Other well-wishers send anything in printed form, just anything, in the firm belief that the islanders yearn for

reading matter even if it is entirely unreadable. I saw a heap of catalogues dealing with moving-staircases and similar inventions unknown on Tristan.

Captain Kerry soon found that his holds and decks were so cluttered with reading matter that he could not work his ship. Even the bathroom was piled high with books. Before he left the Thames, some of the masses of paper were thrown overboard, and other packages went later to enable the crew to deal with bugs.

First port of call was Las Palmas, where two young men named Ronald McCann and Walter Lawis joined the ship. They were passengers, seeking a health trip. Both of them went on shore when *Pandora* reached Tristan, and remained there while the ship went about her more or less

mysterious business at Inaccessible and Nightingale islands. When the ship returned, Captain Kerry found that McCann was missing. He had tried to reach a precipitous section of the island without a guide and had fallen to his death. Lawis, who had accompanied McCann some of his way, had almost shared his fate, for he had slipped into a ravine and injured his head and limbs. When he recovered consciousness he found himself surrounded by rats. A search party of islanders heard his shouts and rescued him. They also brought McCann's body to the settlement and he was buried in the island cemetery.

Gough Island, an outlier of the Tristan group two hundred and thirty miles to the south, was visited by the *Pandora* before she turned north again. I shall have a lot to say about remote Gough

Island later; but the *Pandora* came away with nothing to show for her visits to any of these peaks in mid-ocean..

Kerry had trouble with his crew on the way back to England. One seaman was put in irons, charged on arrival at Freetown and sent to prison. This caused some dissatisfaction among the crew. When they were paid off in England, stories went round that Captain Kerry had stolen presents intended for the islanders and sold the stores at various ports. Various people who had sent Bibles and other gifts to Tristan then came to light. Kerry was committed for trial at Bow Street on a charge of theft; and, as I said, the episode ended at the Old Bailey. However, the captain had a sound defence. Walter Lawis testified that he had watched and photographed the

landing of the Tristan cargo. The judge stopped the case, pointing out that Kerry did not anticipate and could not have been expected to carry one thousand five hundred books for a small community of uneducated islanders.

Two years later, undeterred by the fruitless voyage of the *Pandora*, another treasure expedition headed south. This time the adventurers selected a twenty-ton Dover fishing smack *Forget-me-Not*. Captain Pearson, in command, was a qualified master; but his two brothers and a friend who made up the ship's company had never been to sea before.

They loaded provisions for three months, but in actual cash they had only three pounds. Nevertheless, they engaged a half caste cook when they called at the Cape Verde islands,

hoping to pay him out of the treasure they expected to find on the Tristan group.

They tried to land at South Trinidad to lift the millions hidden there by Benito the pirate; or by the fugitives from Lima early last century when Bolivar was about to sack the city. Visions of jewels and gold faded when the surf prevented them from stepping on shore. Knight had a run for his money at South Trinidad, but the Pearson brothers did not even come within reach of the pincers of the island's huge land crabs.

Inaccessible was their next anchorage. They found neither the *Blenden Hall* treasure nor the guano they expected. Three sheep and a dog left by the Tristan people met them. By this time their stores had dwindled and they were glad to eat the sheep. Nightingale

Island provided them with nothing more valuable than petrels' eggs.¹⁴ When they reached the Tristan settlement their provision lockers were nearly empty. Fortunately a generous man named Casper Keytel was then living on Tristan and trying to open up a sheep and cattle trade with Cape Town. Keytel supplied the famished men aboard *Forget-me-Not* with mutton and fish, potatoes and milk. They rested at Tristan for eighteen days, sailed on to Gough Island, searched in vain for guano, caught fish for the frying pan, and then steered for Table Bay.

When *Forgot-me-Not* made Table Bay with the Tristan mails on Christmas

¹⁴ According to Tristan legend, one chest of pirates' silver was found on Nightingale many years ago and removed to the United States; but other chests remain hidden there.

Day 1908 she had sailed ten thousand miles in seven months since leaving England. Once again her larder was practically empty. They had only a few pounds of flour, a little tea and four gallons of tainted water. Treasure hunting may become a hungry business. Captain Pearson sold *Forget-me-Not* in Cape Town, and she remained in the South African coasting and fishing trade for many years.

Those who still believe there is a fortune in guano awaiting recovery in the Tristan group should look up the report by Dr. G. Vibert Douglas, geologist in the *Quest*, who took samples. Mr. J. Q. Rowett, the businessman who backed Shackleton, had the guano analysed. The experts decided that the nitrates had been washed out and the deposits were not worth exploiting. The truth about

treasure isles is often depressing, but the treasure hunters go sailing on.

Chapter Twenty-Five

THE GOUGH ISLAND DIAMONDS

GOUGH ISLAND, that lovely and lonely outlier of the Tristan da Cunha group, was once the scene of a diamond hunt. It was fantastic; it cost one life and thousands of pounds. Yet it never lacked the touch of adventure that transforms so many of man's stupid and greedy enterprises.

I have been a long time gathering the story of Gough Island and the men who were marooned there to search for a new Kimberley in mid-ocean. It started in Cape Town soon after World War I, when Captain Percival, master mariner, produced a tobacco-bag full of the typical gravel that accompanies river diamonds-garnets and moon-stones, carbon and agate, cat's-eyes and olivine. Apart from the gravel he

had a few small but genuine diamonds. He placed this assortment in front of Mr. A. S. ("Sandy") Garden, general manager of Irvin and Johnson, the South African whaling and trawling firm. "I want you to send an expedition to the place where these stones came from," suggested Captain Percival.

"Sandy" Garden was a Scot, an extremely level-headed business man, though he was often daring in those seafaring enterprises which he understood. He listened patiently to Percival's story, and then pointed out that he knew more about fish than diamonds.

"I am convinced that there are diamonds on Gough Island," declared Percival. "I have come to you because your ships pass the island on the way down to South Georgia, and it would

be easy for you to drop a party of men there and pick them up when the ship returns to Cape Town. It will cost a bit, of course, but I am so sure about the diamonds that I am willing to put one thousand pounds of my own money into the venture.”

Even the sceptical “Sandy” Garden was impressed by that offer. However, he first sent the gravel to a metallurgist. He was informed that it was the usual diamondiferous “wash”, similar to that found on the alluvial diggings near Kimberley. With great secrecy a contract was drawn up.

Garden was sending an old tramp, the S.S. *Woodville* from Cape Town to the South Georgia whaling stations with stores in May that year, 1919.¹⁵ It was

arranged that the *Woodville* would drop the expedition on Gough Island and pick them, up when she returned with her cargo of whale oil about two months later. Percival introduced a man of about sixty with diamond experience, J. G. Fenton, as leader; and a prospector from Barkly West named Francois Xavier Xiegler was engaged. The eleven native labourers included a little yellow Bushman and a Zulu. They had all worked on the river diggings.

Two former Tristan islanders who had settled in Cape Town were recruited shortly before the *Woodville* sailed. They were Willy Swain, aged thirty, a carpenter who declared that he could face anything except mice; and James

¹⁵ The *Woodville* was the ship that carried Sir Ernest Shackleton’s body back from

Montevideo to South Georgia for burial in 1922 at the request of Lady Shackleton.

Hagan, an older man, who had been to Gough Island before as a seal hunter.

Finally the shrewd “Sandy” Garden decided to send one of his sons along as “official observer”. You never know what may happen on a treasure hunt, and it is a wise precaution to have a member of the family on the spot. I owe much of my secret information to Roderick Garden, the thirteen-year-old adventurer; though he had passed fifty when he lent me his diary and photographs and told me the story. But even Roderick did not know the true villain of the piece.

Now observe remote Gough Island, the background of this queer episode which has only been mentioned and never described before. Gough was discovered early in the sixteenth century, when the Portuguese were exploring the southern oceans. The

name of the navigator who placed this green crumb of new land on the chart has been lost. Captain Gough of the British ship *Richmond* came along about a century later and thought he saw an island about four hundred miles to the east of the true island which the Portuguese had marked. In all probability Gough sighted a cloud or an iceberg, and logged it as an island. It is unlikely that Gough ever saw the fragment of land which became known as Gough Island.

American sealers landed on Gough now and again during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but these tough mariners said little about their hunting grounds for fear of rivals. The first detailed account of Gough was given by Captain Peter Heywood, R. N. in 1811, when he took H.M.S. *Nereus* there. (Heywood, by the way,

had served as a boy in the *Bounty* during the mutiny, but had gone unpunished owing to his age and had been promoted because of his ability.) In his diary Heywood described the island as “rising up almost perpendicularly from the sea in high cliffs, down the fissures of which fall several beautiful cascades”.

Heywood knew there were American sealers on the island. “They were not a little overjoyed when I told them that they might expect daily to see their ship to take them off the island,” he wrote. “Not that they had been in want of food, for they informed me that they caught a great variety of birds up in the hills by lighting a fire there in the night, at which they flew in such great numbers that they knocked them down with sticks.”

No doubt the sealers, in their ignorance, ate some of the rarest birds in the world. Gough is an island of rarities, as you will see later.

Gough Island remained uninhabited for decades at a stretch. The sealing was never as good there as it was on the cold islands farther south. Towards the end of last century, however, the American sealer *Francis Alleyn* dropped a party there. George Comer, the second mate, was an intelligent man and something of a naturalist. He discovered the flightless bird, the Gough Island Rail, which was new to science. Comer provided the first proper description of the interior of the island, the birds and animals and the Robinson Crusoe life of the sealers. They lived very largely on rock hopper penguin eggs; but some potatoes were growing wild as a result

of a previous settlement, and there were seals and sea elephants when they needed meat.

Comer's party put up a hut on the north coast of the island. They were trudging back to their camp on the east coast in a snowstorm one October night when one man, Jose Gomez, lost touch with his companions. Next day he was found frozen to death. For many years the only human monument in the interior of this wild island was the wooden board with the words: "Jose Gomez, perished in the snow."

Among the crew of the *Francis Alleyn* was a young Tristan islander, Robert Franklin Glass. I came to know him fairly well, for he was my host during two visits to the island. (On the second occasion he greeted me humorously with the words: "Mr. Green, your usual room is ready for you.") I want

you to remember Bob Glass, for you will meet him again. He is a most important character in this story.

Last of the sealing expeditions was the party from the schooner *Wild Rose* of Cape Town, about seventy years ago. They had little luck, and their attempts to boil down penguins for oil were unsuccessful. When the schooner returned the men were so overjoyed, according to the diary of Fred Andrews the leader, that "they set fire to their huts in a drunken frolic". Scientists and explorers set foot on Gough Island early this century, but there were no more Crusoe's until the diamond expedition arrived on May 31, 1919. And now Roderick Garden is telling the story.

"We never expected to reach Gough Island alive," began Roderick. "The old *Woodville*, a tramp of three

thousand tons, had been condemned just before the war, and had only remained at sea because of the shortage of ships. We struck heavy weather soon after leaving Cape Town, and the master, Captain Goodwin, expected her to break her back. The great seas from the Antarctic came over solid. Once when we swung round the lifeboats were smashed in the davits. For a week I ate practically nothing."

It took the shuddering *Woodville* a fortnight to cover the fifteen hundred miles from Cape Town to Gough Island. The landfall came both as a relief and as a surprise to Roderick. He had not imagined such a large island, oblong in shape, eight miles in length, four miles wide, rising to nearly three thousand feet. Some of the coastal cliffs are fifteen hundred feet high.

Peaks and queer rock formations loom up above the stony bays and surf-beaten beaches. It is a green island, unspoilt either by the hand of man, or the rats and goats which have ravaged Tristan. Snow falls on the mountains, but Gough is never ice-covered. Here is the perfect retreat for those who can bear an isolation greater even than Tristan da Cunha.

One of Gough Island's loveliest scenes is the Glen on the east coast. Here is the only good landing beach and the only valley giving fairly easy access to the interior. Here are fern-covered slopes, island trees and tussock grass, a cave and a stream. Looking up the Glen there is a primeval forest and the weird rock tower known as the Hog's Tooth.

Roderick went on shore in the first boat. Hagan took charge, but the swell

defeated him and the boat was damaged on the beach strewn with boulders. It floated on its airtight tanks, however, and the men were able to return to the ship. Roderick stayed on shore, sleeping in the cave where many adventurous spirits have left their names. (Roderick told me that Captain Scott of Antarctic fame painted his name on the rock, but I think he confused the faint inscription with the Scotia expedition, which reached Gough in 1904 and spent three days there.) There were so many mice in the cave that Roderick asked for a cat to be sent on shore. The cat returned to the ship gorged with mice. It is fortunate that a pair of cats were not left there, as they and their descendants would have played havoc with the marvellous bird life.

Roderick had a bulldog which accompanied him everywhere. They had no sheep or fowls with them; but the *Woodville* lay off the island for eight days sending stores on shore whenever the sea was calm enough. She was due to return in two months, as I have said, but the food supply would have lasted the sixteen men for six months. They had pickled beef and pork in barrels, square boxes of ship's biscuit and bully beef. "I also remember only too well the dried potatoes," Roderick said. "They were thin and yellow, like fried chips, but they became swollen when boiled and tasted horrible."

For a week Roderick and the white men slept in the cave while the Tristan islanders put up a prefabricated wooden hut for them. "It nearly blew away down the Glen the first night we slept

in it, and had to be moored with a hawser,” Roderick declared.

Then the Tristan islanders built themselves a cottage of boulders, thatched with tussock grass in Tristan fashion, and called it Boston Villa. The fireplace was a work of art, and a great deal of fish was smoked there. The eleven native labourers moved into the cave. And the expedition was ready to search for diamonds.

“Fenton, our elderly leader, had one eye and one arm,” Roderick recalled. “He was a bit of a spiritualist, and when we heard a mysterious knocking at the door of the hut after the *Woodville* had left, he said it meant that something had happened to the ship. Other knocks came later and in a way he turned out to be right. Fenton had also studied Christian Science, and when I suffered from toothache he

explained that it was merely my imagination. I managed to get some brandy, and that helped.”

“Xiegler the prospector was a powerful, good-natured man. He taught me to shoot and often lent me his rifle. The two ex-Tristan islanders were good fellows, too, and taught us the Tristan names for all the birds and fish. The native labourers had never seen the sea before the voyage in the *Woodville*. I took some of them out fishing one day, and when I hauled a crawfish into the boat one native was so terrified that he jumped yelling over the side.”

Such was the personnel of the Gough Island expedition. Captain Goodwin had supplied them with a chart, marked with a cross on the north coast. According to Captain Percival, the diamonds and gravel had come from



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two places – the Glen, where they were living, and a place called Baker's Oven on the north coast. Baker's Oven was a cave with a square mouth which resembled an oven. A stream there was supposed to have brought down the diamonds. Captain Percival claimed to have noticed the diamondiferous formation of the island in both places after landslides; the typical "blue ground" spattered with carbon.

"Fenton was always optimistic," Roderick went on. "Xiegler, the more practical man, could find nothing in the Glen to suggest diamonds. Two months passed before the sun came out and the sea was calm enough to allow us to pull round to the north coast in our dinghy. We could find no sign of a stream at the spot marked with a cross, and then Xiegler declared

that the prospects of finding diamonds on Gough were very poor indeed."

All this time the natives had been digging trenches in the Glen and putting the earth through the diamond-washing machine. They also bored into a cliff which might have been one of those where Captain Percival's landslides had occurred. A number of caves were explored, but not a sign of diamonds could they find anywhere.

Young Roderick Garden was probably the happiest member of the expedition. Fishing was wonderful, especially a species which the Tristan islanders called "blue fish", which put up such a fight that the lines often broke. Roderick climbed down the cliffs, roped for safety, and collected molly-mauk's eggs. The penguins arrived late that year, but after they had pottered up the Glen in thousands to

their rookery the men collected eggs by the hundred. Roderick shot a sea elephant with a revolver. Sometimes he made the round trip, lasting five hours, to the breeding place of the wandering albatrosses on the plateau. Many a young “gony”, as the Tristanites called them, went into the pot. Roderick gathered wild celery in the Glen. He also killed the flightless rail occasionally for pies. “It was hard to catch in the undergrowth,” he remembered.

Whenever they landed on a beach away from the Glen and walked above high-water mark, they found the wreckage of the southern oceans – masts, spars, hatches and other relics. According to the official records, only one shipwreck on Gough had been reported; the sailing ship *Philena Winslow* of Portland, Maine, in 1878,

with a cargo of coal. Her crew were saved by a passing ship and landed on Tristan. Roderick Garden and others who have lived on Gough are sure that this island has seen the end of a number of missing ships. “If a ship going through fog at full speed crashed into the western side of Gough, where the cliffs drop sheer into deep water, there would be no survivors,” Roderick told me. “I think the *Kobenhavn* met her fate on Gough Island.”

As the months passed the men on Gough Island began to wonder what had happened to the *Woodville*. Not a ship was sighted all the time they were there. Sometimes a light travelled on the sea past the Glen, a will-o'-the-wisp. Once the cottage of the Tristanites caught fire. One of the native labourers died as a result of a throat



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affliction, and they all gathered round the waterlogged grave up the Glen while Fenton conducted the burial service.

Tobacco ran out. Desperate smokers searched the island for leaves which might serve as substitutes. However, young Roderick had hidden away a number of tins of strong and mild tobacco, and he doled out rations on special occasions.

And still they looked in vain for the battered hull of the *Woodville*. They drank the last of their tea, but there was no shortage of coffee. The natives had plenty of mealie meal; and they used some of their sugar to make an intoxicating drink.

Bread was a failure. They never had bread on Gough Island; only the ship's biscuit and some good Australian

tinned butter. Much flour remained unused simply because no one knew the secret of bread-making.

No one had thought of bringing games to pass the time, but Roderick made a draught-board. They had only a few books. Long after all hope of finding diamonds had vanished, the natives were kept at work digging and washing. It was felt that idleness might affect their morale.

Boredom was really responsible for the diamond expedition's "memorial" which puzzled Commander Frank Wild of the *Quest* and later Gough Island visitors. Xiegler found a large slab of slate two inches thick and carved his name on it. The others (except the natives) followed his example. They placed it in the cave, little knowing that it would be copied by other visitors and appear in the

world's newspapers as the "Riddle of Gough Island".

Even young Roderick, that tough and enthusiastic Crusoe, was pleased to see the *Woodville* when she appeared on October 3 and dropped anchor off Glen Beach. They had been four months on the island, twice as long as they had expected to stay there. They had almost forgotten the diamonds. When Captain Goodwin came on shore they gathered round to hear why the ship had been delayed.

"We were on fire after we left you, and had to let sea water into the hold to put it out," Captain Goodwin explained. "Then we were damaged in the ice down south – it was a bad winter. Barrels of oil were frozen into the ground at the whaling station, and we had to use steam on them before we could load our cargo."

Fenton nodded knowingly. "Remember that knocking on the door? I told you there was something wrong with the *Woodville*."

"Yes, but what about the diamonds?" put in Captain Goodwin anxiously. "What luck?"

He could hardly believe it when he heard the sad story. After some argument Fenton produced the chart Goodwin had given him and indicated the place on the north coast where they had searched for the diamond stream and failed to find it.

"You've been prospecting at the wrong spot," shouted Goodwin angrily. "Four months wasted, that's what it amounts to." Goodwin and Fenton went on board the *Woodville* and compared charts. "Sure enough, someone had made a hell of a

mistake,” Roderick Garden told me. “Goodwin had the original chart with the Baker’s Oven site marked by Captain Percival. Fenton had an identical chart, but somehow or other someone had placed the cross on another spot. I believe there was a pretty fierce row aboard the *Woodville* that day.”

So they decided to pack up and leave the Glen and do some prospecting at Baker’s Oven. Just before they left Goodwin asked Fenton if they had used the barrel of vinegar he had landed in error. It was intended for South Georgia, and was really a barrel of brandy, labelled vinegar to avoid the risk of broaching.

The men on Gough Island had never even examined the barrel. Goodwin turned it over and found the marks of a drill. Someone in his crew had scented

the brandy before the barrel had left the ship, and had stolen the lot.

Goodwin took the *Woodville* round to Baker’s Oven and he landed with the prospectors. It was impossible to delay the ship for long, as it was necessary to keep steam up and a serious delay would have meant a shortage of coal. No diamonds were found during this brief visit, but Goodwin was not satisfied. Everyone felt that a proper search at Baker’s Oven might have been successful. However, there was nothing for it but to return to Cape Town.

“Sandy” Garden met his son on the wharf. They had received no news, for the wireless set on the *Woodville* only had a range of about one hundred miles. “Peace has been signed, General Botha is dead – and butter has

gone up to five shillings a pound,” announced “Sandy” Garden.

Roderick received his pay as observer at the rate of one pound a month. He was then sent away to school in Scotland. The problem of the Gough Island diamonds remained to be solved.

It was decided (still amid great secrecy) that Captain Goodwin should take the steam whaler *Truls* to Gough Island and do enough prospecting to prove or disprove the presence of diamonds at Baker’s Oven. He left Cape Town on January 12, 1920, and spent fourteen days at Gough. Goodwin told me long afterwards that he had two worries on his mind; the complete absence of diamonds, and the amount of coal he was using. His crew killed and cut up the blubber of a number of sea elephants for the

furnaces. Goodwin finally decided to consult the man who had really been responsible for the first report of diamonds on Gough Island.

This man was the Robert Franklin Glass I have already introduced, the man who entertained me during my visits to Tristan. To understand the extraordinary affair of the Gough Island diamonds you must know something more about my rascally friend Bob Glass. I did not care to tell this story while he was alive, but he died in 1943 at the early age (for Tristan) of seventy.

Bob Glass was a tall, wiry man who had seen many countries.¹⁶ He had

¹⁶ Members of the Glass family still move away from Tristan occasionally. In 1952, Valerie Glass went to England for her education, and in October 1959 Wilson Glass

served not only in the schooner *Francis Alleyn*, which had taken him to Gough, but also in the barque *Swallow* of Boston and on the Cape coast in the schooner *Lilla*. He had worked in London and the United States; he wore the South African War medals, for he had served in Kitchener's Scouts; he was no simple islander but a crafty citizen of the world. After the South African War he had returned to Tristan to find sanctuary from the severe depression. There he had raised such a large family – six sons and two daughters – that he had been unable to venture out into the world again.

In the hard years that followed his return to the island Bob Glass lived for

with his wife and daughter went to the Falkland Islands.

the day when a visiting ship would be greeted with the traditional cry of "Sail ho!". Among the few ships that called during World War I was one commanded by Captain Percival.

Bob Glass had tried his luck on the river diggings near Kimberley during his years in South Africa, and had come away with samples of diamondiferous gravel and a few almost worthless diamonds. The farsighted Glass showed these specimens to Captain Percival and gave him to understand that an expedition to Gough Island would find rich deposits in the Glen and at Baker's Oven. Of course Glass was bent only on bringing a ship to Tristan; for ships carried badly-needed groceries, and there was always a prospect of exchanging cattle for timber and canvas.

Percival had sailed past Gough, but had never prospected there. He took the samples to "Sandy" Garden, and now the whole affair had gone full circle and Goodwin was heading for Tristan to have a word with Bob Glass.

Bob Glass kept up his pretence to the very end. He sailed back to Gough in the Truls and helped Goodwin to use dynamite in the cave at Baker's Oven. Even when no diamonds came to light, Glass still maintained that his gravel and diamonds had come from the stream at Baker's Oven. There was nothing to be done about it. Captain Goodwin steamed back to Tristan and presented the islanders with some tea, flour and other food. The crew went on shore and gave the people clothes in exchange for penguin feather mats and other Tristan curios. When the

Truls left she carried the mail. No doubt Bob Glass felt that his diamonds had served their purpose.

Let me add, in case any further warning is necessary, that geologists who have visited Gough Island in recent years have pointed out that there is nothing in the structure of the island to hold out even a remote hope of diamonds.

Roderick Garden never regretted his youthful wild-geese chase. His old snapshots still remind him of the Glen where he roamed with his bulldog month after month. He can almost hear the sea-elephants roaring at night, the whistling of the petrels and the "chack-chack" of the rails. "The weirdest relics I saw on Gough were the footmarks of previous visitors," Roderick told me. "They had walked on the moss years before, and the

moss had changed colour and retained the footmarks. It was eerie". Gough Island's real wealth lies in the animal and plant rarities I have mentioned. Only there and on a few other remote islands will you find the breeding grounds of the fur seal known as *Arctocephalus gazella*. Only on Gough, in a single grove, will you see the unique *Sophora*, the mysterious flowering tree with relatives as far away as New Zealand. Only on this little island does the little glossy black rail with its red comb and tiny wings scuttle into the undergrowth along the streams whistling with fright. Only here will the fearless green island bunting hop on to your shoulder. These treasures are indeed worth more than diamonds.

Bob Glass still had a small supply of diamondiferous gravel in 1923, when I

spent a couple of nights with him. He brought out the bag when we were alone and whispered to me: "Mr. Green, I've been over to Inaccessible, prospecting for diamonds. I think someone in Cape Town ought to send a ship here. I could show them where I found this stuff on Inaccessible."

But even in those days I knew something about Bob Glass and the Gough Island diamonds. If only "Sandy" Garden had been there to hear him!

Nevertheless, there may be wealth on Gough Island after all. Not long ago I was searching the British Museum library for volumes and manuscripts dealing with treasure expeditions when I came across an old work entitled "Hints for Treasure Seekers". One passage read:

“It is well known that on the unfrequented bit of sea-washed earth called Gough Island a very wicked pirate deposited ill-gotten gains. The place to dig is close to a conspicuous spire or pinnacle of stone on the western end of the island, the name of which natural landmark is set down on the charts as Church Rock.”

Let me add that I have located Church Rock, close to one of the island's landing places. But I have an idea that someone will have been there ahead of me.

Chapter Twenty-Six
ATLANTIS AND OTHER LOST
ISLANDS

*From year unto year on the ocean's
blue rim,
The beautiful spectre showed lovely
and dim;
The golden clouds curtained the
deep where it lay,
And it looked like an Eden, away,
far away.*

Gerald Griffin:

“The Isle of the Blest.”

ATLANTIS, the undying legend of the lost continent, greatest of all ocean mysteries, has its roots in Africa. It still inspires a vast literature and interesting theories are put forward. Any man who is able to prove that Plato's story was substantially true will march straight into the hall of fame.

I know that a former curator of the South African Museum in Cape Town sent a reliable assistant to St. Helena years ago to examine “relics of primitive man” found on the island. It may sound foolish now; but such a discovery, had it been confirmed, would have transformed many established scientific beliefs into rank heresies. It would also have given visible support to the Atlantis theory. But it was false. The chipped stones picked up on the mid-ocean island were natural fragments and not the work of man.

So the lost continent still arouses bitter controversy and baffles the finest brains. Do you remember the origin of it all? Plato, the Greek philosopher, told of a huge land opposite the present strait of Gibraltar, a larger continent than Africa and Asia to-

gether, which was engulfed in a day and night of earthquakes and floods. It was a marvellous highly-civilised country with thriving cities, temples and palaces, bridges and canals. And, of course, great wealth in silver, gold and ivory, and beautiful women. Everyone lived peacefully in this Utopia, but the Atlantean warriors, armed with javelins, invaded North Africa. at different times and once foolishly attacked Athens. They were defeated by the Athenians and driven out of the Mediterranean. Plato gave 9600 B.C. as the date of the catastrophe which caused Atlantis to sink beneath the waves.

For many uncritical centuries the Atlantis legend was accepted wholly as fact. Plato was not a fiction writer but a serious author. He must have realised that some would not believe

him, however, for he added these words: "The Atlantis legend is by no means a fairy-tale, but in every respect true history." And he gave as his authority his own ancestor Solon, who heard the story told by Egyptian priests.

Scientists began to ridicule the Atlantis legend in the seventeenth century. However, the critics received a shock towards the end of last century when deep-sea soundings in the North and South Atlantic revealed the presence of a "median ridge" about nine thousand feet higher than the ocean bed. This runs from Arctic to Antarctic. In my wanderings over the Atlantic I have glimpsed certain peaks of the ridge which rise as islands – Madeira, the Canaries, St. Pauls Rocks where the ridge approaches Brazil, and St. Helena, Tristan and Gough where

it moves out into deep water again. This gigantic range, this long spinal cord above and below the surface, speaks clearly enough of a last continent. But when was it lost?

Most scientists, I believe accept an Atlantis of great age, sixty million years or so before mankind appeared on earth. Scientists who believe in something like the Atlantis of Plato are now in a minority. Yet they are worth hearing.

Pro-Atlanteans point first of all to remarkable similarities between the ancient civilisations, architecture, customs and religions of South America, North Africa and Western Europe. Sun worshippers lived on both sides of the ocean. Among the Aztecs there was a flood legend; the Israelites and Babylonians shared that legend. The mysterious Basque language of

the Pyrenees, which is not based on any European tongue, has affinities with American aboriginal languages. Pyramids are found not only in Egypt but in Yucatan, Mexico; and in both those widely-separated lands the dead were mummified and similar objects were placed in tombs.

American Indians have a legend of gods or white strangers living on an island in the ocean to the east of their country. Mediterranean peoples once believed in an "Island of the Blessed" to the west.

Then there is the jade mystery. Maya tombs in Central America have yielded ornaments of beautiful green jade. Large pieces were found in the earliest tombs, dwindling in size when more recent tombs were opened. Jade is not mined anywhere in Central or

South America. It is suggested that the jade came from Atlantis.

Professor Edward Hull, in his day president of the Royal Geological Society of Ireland, was a firm believer in Atlantis. "The flora and fauna of the two hemispheres support the geological theory that there was a common centre in the Atlantic where, life began," Hull declared. "Before and during the glacial epoch, great land bridges north and south spanned the Atlantic Ocean. I have made this deduction by a careful study of the soundings as recorded on the Admiralty charts."

Another geologist in Ireland, Professor R. F. Scharff, held that Madeira and the Azores were still connected with the Iberian Peninsula when man appeared on the scene. He mapped out a continent stretching as far south as

St. Helena, and thought it began to subside before the late tertiary period. But man was able to reach certain parts, which later became islands, by land.

When you compare plants and animals further dramatic similarities are noticed. Indeed, there are identical genera and species in America and Africa; ants, moths, butterflies and earth-worms, slugs, snails and land-shells which might have travelled short distances, but which could hardly have crossed the present ocean. A land bridge in the shape of Atlantis is also suggested to account for certain lizards of Chile, which are closely related to a North African species, and to explain the similarities between freshwater crustaceans known as decapods on both sides of the Atlantic.

The monk seal, a charming stage performer but a stay-at-home animal, occurs in the Mediterranean and again in the West Indies. It has never been observed far from land.

Wild goats and rabbits appear to have been discovered on the Azores when the first explorers arrived. One island, now San Miguel was named Isle of Goats, while Flores was originally Rabbit Island. If these mammals were really indigenous, they must have reached the Azores by a land bridge and survived because the peaks of the Azores remained above the ocean when Atlantis was destroyed.

Pro-Atlantean geologists have been greatly cheered by recent samples from the Atlantic bed, and also certain other investigations and submarine upheavals. Sabrina, a volcanic island in the Azores, disappeared in historic

times-just like the much larger Atlantis! A cable ship operating five hundred miles north of the Azores sent a grappling iron seventeen hundred fathoms down and brought up chips of vitreous lava. Dr. Pierre Termier, director of the French geological survey, who had made a special study of lava after the Mont Pelee disaster declared that the lava from the grappling iron should have crystallised if it had been formed under water. The fact that it was vitreous proved that it had solidified only under atmospheric pressure. So the sea bed had once been a land or mountain above the surface. It had been covered with lava and had then dropped suddenly to a depth of ten thousand feet. Termier fixed the time of this submergence in what geologists call the "present epoch," because the region is still unstable and

the lava had not decomposed. Of course the geological “present” may mean a long time ago. Call it fifteen thousand years.

Swedish scientists took sediment cores from the bottom of the Atlantic off the West African coast a few years ago. They found diatoms (microscopic forms of plant life) which only occur in fresh water. So they deduced that a lake had once existed there, and that the part of the Atlantic “median ridge” where they were working had once been above the sea.

Professor Charles Schuchert looked for Atlantis off the western coast of Africa and claimed to have found it in five of the Cape Verde islands and three of the Canary group. Rocks, living plants and animals showed unmistakable links with those of Africa in tertiary times. “These islands

are fragments of a great Africa,” he declared.

Is it within the bounds of possibility that a continent populated by human beings should have been overwhelmed by the sea in a matter of hours? Even the keenest Atlanteans do not accept Plato’s story of disaster in a day and a night. But some astronomers believe that Venus may have approached the earth so closely that clouds of vapour from the planet entered the earth’s atmosphere and caused the floods that engulfed Atlantis over a long period.

Catastrophes within fairly recent times show that some tragedy of the distant past may have formed the basis of Plato’s story. Volcanic eruptions followed by tidal waves swamped two thousand square miles of heavily-populated country in India early last century. Less than two centuries ago a

large part of Lisbon slid with a devastating roar into the Atlantic, so that sixty thousand people died within six minutes.

Anti-Atlanteans have gone so far as to declare that Plato invented the whole Atlantis story as a background for his own Utopian ideas which he put forward in his "Republic". This is not the general view. Most opponents of Atlantis are willing to allow a grain of truth, and many bright minds have worked out explanations of the romantic legend.

It is possible that Phoenicians or other early navigators discovered America fifteen hundred years before the Vikings and brought the news back to the Mediterranean. Plato's work suggests this, and one of his intriguing sentences reads: "The island (Atlantis) was on the way to other islands, and

from these islands you might pass to the whole of the opposite continent which surrounds the true ocean."

Plato may have been inspired by the collapse of the Minoan empire in Crete about 1400 B.C. The whole seaborne trade between Europe, Asia and Africa was in Cretan hands. Minoans became wealthy as a result of sea power; their rulers lived in palaces like Plato's Atlanteans. Then some shock broke them. Their cities were raided and sacked. The defeat of the Minoans was so complete that their kingdom might just as well have vanished into the sea. And so Phoenician seamen came to dominate the Mediterranean. Was the legend related by Plato an echo of Crete? It is hard to see how a land described by Plato as beyond the Pillars of Hercules (Strait of Gibraltar) should have

become confused with Crete. At that time, though, even a voyage from Egypt to Crete must have been a great undertaking for coastal navigators; and so the distance may have been exaggerated.

Professor Leo Frobenius of Zimbabwe fame organised one expedition after another, during thirty years, searching the Senegambian territories in West Africa. He was convinced that the early Phoenicians first touched at the Canaries and then landed on the West African coast. They were unaware that they were in Africa, and thought they had discovered a new continent, which they called Atlantis.

Another school of thought has placed Atlantis in Spain. They point to the cave paintings there as relics of Atlantean culture, far in advance of the crudities of prehistoric man. Yet

another theory puts Atlantis in the celebrated Mareth salt marshes of Western Libya. There is reason to believe that the farms of a Neolithic race were suddenly overwhelmed by a flood after an earthquake and the survivors were forced to emigrate in many directions. Some went as far as Britain, where traces of their non-Aryan language are found in Wales. Under the marshes known only too well to soldiers of World War II, say the theorists, will be found the farms of the drowned race which gave rise to Plato's Atlantis.

I think the most plausible theory of all is based on the fact that one lost land has been found under the sea. The great Dogger Bank in the North Sea was dry land thousands of years ago, and trawlers have brought up many

stone implements, proving that it was inhabited.

Divers have located stone walls in the sea near Heligoland. Some archaeologists believe that these walls surrounded the temple of Poseidon on the “royal isle” of Atlantis in Plato’s story. Plato mentioned a substance called “orichale” which the Atlanteans valued as highly as gold. This has been identified as amber, which is often found in Heligoland waters. The ivory mentioned by Plato may easily have been the mammoth, walrus and narwhal ivory which still comes up in the nets of Dogger Bank trawlers. No doubt the “Atlanteans” (who were really Frisians) exchanged amber and ivory for the silver and gold of Plato’s narrative. Heligoland has yielded copper.

History relates that a North Sea people once sent a great military expedition to Greece, and conquered the country except Athens; yet another fact which fits into Plato’s story. It was a slow process, the flooding of the North Sea lands by melting glaciers. According to Frisian folklore, the last of their old North Sea possessions only disappeared about seven hundred years ago. But the Frisians have always been at war with the sea. Their islands are strung along the coast of Europe for nearly three hundred miles from the Netherlands to Denmark. Since the thirteenth century the North Frisian islands have shrunk from over one thousand square miles to about one hundred. Frisian legends speak truly of drowned villages and sunken fields, and the plateau in the North Sea which may have been Plato’s Atlantis.

I like the Frisian theory because so many of the main points in Plato's story are corroborated. Although the North Sea is not opposite the Pillars of Hercules, it is outside the Strait of Gibraltar; thus the distant Dogger Bank plateau is far more likely to have given rise to the Atlantis legend than the island of Crete.

However, there must have been many other floods in pre-history. Explorers may yet find not one Atlantis but many relics of lost peoples in different corners of the oceans.

Benjamin Jowett, the English scholar who translated Plato, remarked: "Is it not a wonderful thing that a few pages of one of Plato's 'Dialogues' have grown into a great legend spreading far and wide over the nations of Europe? It was a legend so adapted to the human mind that it made a

habitation for itself in any country. The tale of Atlantis is the fabric of a vision, but it has never ceased to interest mankind."

Indeed, it fascinated William Ewart Gladstone, prime minister of Britain, to such an extent that he tried to send a man-o'-war in search of Atlantis. This was vetoed by the Treasury on the ground of expense. No such paltry motive deterred Mrs. Elizabeth Blossom of Cleveland, Ohio, who sent the schooner Blossom up and down the South Atlantic for years in search of Atlantis. That was several decades ago and the scientists lacked the sounding and radar devices available today. Nevertheless, they searched many islands, as the expedition leader said, for "a missing link that will connect Atlantis with the present and transfer

the lost continent from mythology to history”.

They climbed the mountains of the Azores and the Cape Verde islands and many others, hoping to find relics of Atlantean civilisation. They stayed so long at St. Helena, that ancient landmass in mid-ocean, that one or two of the crew married island girls and settled on the island. But they did not find a trace of Atlantis. They were not the first to fail in that quest, and others will seek Atlantis in the future.

Plato certainly wrote one of the world's most enthralling tales when he opened with the simple words: “I will tell an old-world story...”

Atlantis, if there was an Atlantis, vanished before the first charts were drawn by daring seamen. Yet the British Admiralty charts of the

twentieth century still show an island here and there marked with the mystic letters “P.D.” (Position doubtful) or “E.D.” (Existence Doubtful.)

Early explorers, with inaccurate clocks and primitive sextants, made mistakes which remained uncorrected until fairly recently. Some errors in very remote places have never been corrected. Africa's oceans and the sailing ship routes to the south of Africa contain a fair number of such oddities. Often you are left wondering what the old seamen really saw when they reported islands which have never been found.

Ship after ship was sent out by the Dutch East India Company at the Cape in the late seventeenth century to search for St. Helena Nova, a lovely island supposed to lie somewhere in the empty ocean between St. Helena

and the African coast. This belief was strengthened by a statement made to the Company at Batavia by Lodewyk Claessen, a ship's carpenter. Claessen said he had been taken prisoner by the Portuguese and had served in one of their ships.

One day the ship came to an island where cattle roamed and fruit and vegetables grew well. He knew nothing of navigation, but it was not far from St. Helena. During two visits on shore he saw the Portuguese building forts. Claessen declared that the island would make an admirable refreshment station as there was a good harbour.

Portuguese charts showed this island – hence the Dutch expeditions. Some fleets sailed in line abreast scouring the South Atlantic. Those eager seamen never sighted St. Helena Nova; but even when they failed in their

mission the phantom isle remained on the charts. Inquisitive skippers posted men at their mastheads for years afterwards when they sailed in the waters round St. Helena. Not until late in the eighteenth century was St. Helena Nova expunged from the charts.

Saxemburgh, which was supposed to lie half-way between South America and South Africa in latitude thirty south, lasted much longer than St. Helena Nova and appeared far more real. It was first reported by Captain J. Lindeman in 1670. Two men at the masthead also saw the island with its “narrow peak like a column”. Captain Galloway of the American ship *Fanny* confirmed the presence of the island more than a century later. Galloway reported that the island remained in sight for four hours. He, too, observed

the peaked hill and added a bluff at one of the extremities.

Then came Captain J. O. Head sailing past early last century in the ship *True Briton*, and finding Saxemburgh very close to the position given by the two previous master mariners. Captain James Horsburgh, F.R.S., a very careful navigator, looked for the island in vain a few years afterwards. No one ever saw it again.

It was suggested that the men who reported Saxemburgh had seen clouds exactly like land in appearance, and remaining stationary on the horizon for long periods. Other such reports were explained by floating islands, great clumps of seaweed, bundles of bush and grass drifting out of tropical rivers. Some might carry with them enough earth to support a few small trees. No wonder the seamen of old

swore they had seen land where there was no land.

How can we explain Isla Grande? The old South Atlantic charts marked it, and the following description was given. "In the latitude of 45 degrees south there is a very large, pleasant island, discovered by Anthony la Roche, a native of England. There is a good port toward the eastern part in which La Roche found wood, water and fish. They found no people, notwithstanding they stayed there six days."

Other sailors searched for Isla Grande and found indications of land; discoloured water, driftwood and kelp. But the pleasant island has never again been sighted by human eye. Farther south, of course, huge icebergs bearing rocks and earth have been logged as

islands. No such error was possible when La Roche reported Isla Grande.

Captain Robson, of the barque *Anne*, having called at Tristan da Cunha in 1829 sailed on for Mauritius. Six days after leaving Tristan he recorded in his log: "Observed rocks about eight feet above the water, the sea breaking heavily on them. They were something of a horse-shoe shape. There was a good deal of long tangle growing on them."

Now this reef, if it existed in the position given by Captain Robson, would have been situated right across the track of all vessels bound round the Cape to the East. Hundreds of American whalers cruised along that latitude and must have sighted it. So that it was not remarkable that shipmasters should set aside the evidence of Robson's Reef. One

mariner wrote politely: "May we not be permitted to suspect that dead whales, shoals of devil fish and other huge marine monsters are still sometimes mistaken for banks and rocks?"

One island, or rather a group of sharp rocks in mid-ocean, still arouses controversy among geologists as well as lovers of the Atlantis theory. I saw this weird and mysterious outcrop once; the St. Paul's Rocks near the equator between Brazil and West Africa.

The old *Arlanza* of the R.M.S.P., carrying me from Rio to England, ran in close and sounded her siren. Officers on the bridge stared hard through their binoculars, but only the birds responded. If there had been a shipwrecked crew on the rocks,

though, they would have been glad to see us.

St. Paul's Rocks have been known and dreaded by mariners, and charted, for centuries. Just over a hundred years ago a Captain Sandre of the ship *Francois Casimir* reported a "large black mass" some miles to the south of the rocks. Nautical authorities were inclined to scoff at this report, and the old sailing directions remarked: "The statement does not carry much conviction with it."

However, in June 1931, it was reported that two new islands had risen in the South Atlantic near St. Paul's Rocks. This time the British steamer *Lelande* sent the report, and a Brazilian cruiser steamed out to confirm the position and plant the Brazilian flag.

St. Paul's Rocks are mysterious because they do not appear to have the volcanic or coral origin which is to be expected in the small oceanic islands of the tropics. The whole group is only half a mile in circumference, while the highest rock is about sixty feet above sea level. Charles Darwin was puzzled when he landed there nervously and with difficulty (because of the swell and the sharks) from H.M.S. *Beagle*; but he paid more attention to the gannets and terns than the geology.

When the *Scotia* expedition was there early this century the scientists were fascinated by these black rocks of a material found nowhere else in the world. "Is it the wreck of a lost Atlantis?" asked Dr. Hawey Pirie. "If so how has it been reduced to this sharp pinnacle towering up ten thou-

sand feet from its narrow base at the bottom of the Atlantic?”

The classic example of a “hide and seek” island in the South Atlantic is Bouvet, an ice-clad island swept by gales or hidden by fog sixteen hundred miles south-west of Cape Town. It is one of the most isolated specks of land in the world. For two centuries no one could say with certainty whether Bouvet was one island or three, and some mystery clings to it still.

Bouvet, a French naval officer, discovered Bouvet in 1739, estimating the position roughly, as best he could, in cloudy weather. Indeed, the visibility was so poor that he thought it might have been a cape of the Antarctic continent which he had sighted. Cook sailed past to the south several decades later; he saw nothing and

declared that Bouvet had put an iceberg on the chart.

Nevertheless, two British whalers sighted Bouvet again early last century. One of the skippers, Captain Lindsay, gave it his name. Then, in 1825, came Captain Norris, a British sealer, with his little smacks *Lively* and *Sprightly*. Norris knew nothing of previous visitors; and thinking that he had discovered Bouvet he found a name for it – Liverpool Island – and made a pencil sketch of it. The weather came on thick, and Norris did not land on that occasion owing to sleet and snow.

Now comes the mystery. Norris stood away to the north-east, and came upon another island which he estimated to be forty-five miles from Liverpool Island (Bouvet). This new island he named Thompson Island, and three

rocks close by he marked on the chart as the Chimneys.

Soon afterwards Norris returned to the first island and sent boats on shore in quest of seals. His men ran up the Union Jack on instructions from Norris and claimed Bouvet for Britain. One day the sealers were marooned on shore by heavy weather. They had to spend six days on Bouvet without shelter and almost frozen before they were able to return to their ships. Snow and raw seal meat saved their lives.

Norris wrote of Bouvet: "The boats went entirely round the isle and nothing but perpendicular rocks could be seen. It bears evident marks of having been a volcano, as it is nothing less than a complete cinder, with immense veins of lava, which have the

appearance of black glass, though some are streaked with white."

A copy of the log of the *Sprightly*, which is in the British Admiralty archives, reveals that Norris described Thompson Island as a "small, low island". So that he could not possibly have been confusing Thompson with Bouvet, the volcanic peak.

Since that day, one man claimed to have sighted both Bouvet and Thompson Island. He was Captain Fuller, who sailed past in 1893 in the American sealer *Francis Alleyn*. When the German survey ship *Valdivia* arrived five years later, Bouvet Island was there but no sign of Thompson Island could be found!

Since then other vessels equipped with radio and other modern aids to navigation have fixed the position of Bouvet

Island with great accuracy and have failed to find Thompson Island or the Chimneys. Among the visitors to this desolate stretch of ocean were H.M.S. *Milford* (with Admiral E. R. G. R. Evans, the Antarctic explorer on board) in 1934; and, twenty years later, the South African frigate *Transvaal* anchored off Bouvet and sent a boat on shore.

Two men who had set eyes on this most remote island in the world gave me their impressions of it. One was my old friend Commander W. J. Copenhagen. He spoke of the avalanches crashing into the sea as H.M.S. *Milford* cruised round Bouvet; the high winds and heavy seas; and he recalled the words of Admiral Evans. "Navigation in these low latitudes with icebergs about is like riding a bicycle in a graveyard. You see a tombstone

ahead and alter course only to find dozens of others in your path."

The other Bouvet visitor was a Norwegian whaler man. It was at the time when Norway was claiming the island. His whale catcher anchored in the lee of an iceberg which had grounded near an exposed, surf-swept beach. He landed with difficulty, trudged inland and stood at last on the edge of a dead crater. The island, he said, looked like a volcano which had become almost submerged but with a surviving tip thrusting up three thousand feet into the clouds. One sign of man remained on among the ice and snow of this frightening island – an old coal stove. Possibly it had been left there by American sealers last century.

So there is Bouvet, and it is clear that Thompson Island does not exist. Yet

modern scientists are unwilling to regard the report by Norris of two separate islands as false. Such an authority as Dr. Stanley Kemp, F.R.S., was on board the survey ship *Discovery II* when she visited Bouvet and searched for the other island in clear weather. Dr. Kemp summed up: "We quartered the locality thoroughly, examining some six thousand square miles of sea, and no trace of Thompson Island was to be found. Thompson Island thus remains a mystery. Norris's account is so circumstantial that it is impossible to disbelieve it altogether, and the only possibilities seem to be (i) that Norris mistook moranic bergs for islands (ii) that his bearings are completely misleading; and (iii) that the island once existed and has since disappeared. My own personal view is that the

moranic berg theory is the least improbable, for these black bergs can in certain conditions bear a very close resemblance to rocks and islands."

Dr. R. N. Rudmose Brown, an earlier Antarctic scientist, pointed out that it was easier to place an island on the chart than to remove it. "I have seen an ice master of twenty years' experience turn off course for an hour to make sure that a queer loom on the horizon was a berg and not a new island," said Rudmose Brown. He could not explain the strange report by the reliable Captain Norris of two islands (and the Chimneys) where there is, in fact, only one island today.

Chapter Twenty-Seven

SOUTH ATLANTIC CRUISE

*Yes, weekly from Southampton,
Great steamers white and gold,
Go rolling down to Rio
(Roll down-roll down to Rio)
And I'd like to roll to Rio
Some day before I'm old.*

Kipling.

LAST time I rolled across the Atlantic from Table Bay to Rio I was twenty, and travelling by the Grey Funnel Line. Yes I slept in a hammock on board a cruiser of the Royal Navy. I was on shore at Tristan da Cunha for three days. At the end I rose early to watch the incredible peaks of Rio de Janeiro rising from the western sea-rim.

This time I am somewhat older, travelling in the Dutch liner

Boissevain with a large room and bath, a soft mattress and a writing desk. But I am not too old to leave my bed at daybreak for the dramatic return to Rio; and I have an idea that midnight will find me listening to the throbbing Brazilian music. Thank heaven for the legacy of good health which enables me to go about the world enjoying life as I did forty years ago.

This is my first voyage under the flag of Holland, and now I am wondering why I left such a happy experience for so long. Every seafaring nation has something of interest to offer the appreciative traveller. These ships of the Royal Interocean Lines are filled not only with solid Dutch comfort, but with contrasts. All the officers (except the Viennese doctor) are from Holland, the stewardess is English,

and the rest of the crew (except a few Japanese cooks) are Chinese. If you have never been served by slippered, quiet, observant Chinese stewards, there is a pleasure in store for you.

These large, cosmopolitan Dutch liners have a great deal of that elusive quality called atmosphere. They cover half the world on their regular voyages between Japan and South America; and they pick up not only passengers and cargo, but the finest items of food to be found in each port. I always make a point of meeting the chef when I am at sea. Mr. J. van Ploeg of the *Boissevain* showed me how he devised the menus which included several dishes I had not tasted before.

Mr. van Ploeg is an hotel and restaurant chef who came to sea about seven years ago. Trained at Maxim's and Haussmann's in Paris, he was chef de

cuisine at the Palace Hotel in Brussels for twenty years. But he always wanted to travel, and now he has seen the world.

Working under Mr. van Ploeg are a corps of Chinese cooks who have graduated from the company's catering school at Hong Kong. Probably you know that the Chinese are epicures. These men move about the electric kitchen, the charcoal grill and the steam cookers with the sure touch of experts.

Most of the passengers are South Africans, and at the moment only one passenger comes from Holland. Nevertheless, the special dishes of the Netherlands are welcomed by everyone. It is a tradition in all Dutch naval and merchant ships that green pea soup must be served at lunch on Saturdays, and Mr. van Ploeg gives us

a rich soup indeed, accompanied by the customary sippets and fried onion, sausage and pumpernickel.

At lunch time on Sunday there is always *nasi goreng* as a reminder of the old Dutch East Indies. Passengers become so fond of *nasi goreng* that Mr. van Ploeg has had to make many copies of the recipe for this substantial platter of fried rice with pork, shrimps, celery, leeks, onions, sambal and soya sauce – and a fried egg on top. All you have to do to complete the dish is to add a satee sauce of garlic, peanut butter, ketjap and sambal, and help yourself from the tray of mango chutney, chopped onions and gherkins, fried onions, chopped peanuts and shredded coconut.

These ships never go home, but they draw on Holland for herrings and Brussels sprouts, asparagus and green

peas, cauliflower and tinned biscuits, beer, cigars and chocolates. And I must not forget those enormous cheeses from Gouda and Leyden, and the small red cannon-balls for which Edam is famous. The cuisine in Dutch ships, however, is truly international and the menus are as enormous as the cheeses.

Meat comes from the Argentine, so that there is no such thing in the *Boissevain* as a tough beef-steak. Brazil supplies some of the vegetables and fruit, salads and tomatoes, grown at Sao Paulo by Japanese gardeners.

Cape Town provides the best potatoes, sole and crawfish. Mr. van Ploeg declares that the Cape pork is beautiful, and he also speaks well of the duck and chicken. Fresh salmon and trout come from Japan. Strange to say, the rice which European passengers

prefer is shipped at Montevideo. Hong Kong prawns are among the best. Mr. Van Ploeg serves a magnificent Singapore curry of Malayan pineapples chopped up and cooked with lamb.

When I encounter a really memorable meal I add the menu to my collection. One dinner which appealed to me started with salmon mayonnaise, caviar and palmito (heart of Brazilian palm) as hors d'oeuvres. I went on to lobster thermidor, roast veal with black mushrooms, chicory and Brussels sprouts, and wound up with Peach Melba. Eight items from a menu which listed fifty-six different foods.

Special dinners are even more luxurious. I have a Chinese menu, printed on a hand-painted silk fan, to remind me of the Chinese dinner in the *Boissevain*. This ceremony lasted for two hours. It opened with shark's fin

soup, the most complicated soup in the world, simmered for days with green ginger and shredded chicken. I had roast pig's liver and pork, fried chicken, braised lettuce and crab; and even then I had not reached the halfway mark. Fortunately the Chinese portions are small, and I have to eat slowly when using chop-sticks.

A glass of champagne, and I was ready for the quail eggs with brown sauce, the nicest dish of all in my opinion. These are not rotten eggs. They are preserved eggs, the flavour is superb, and clever Chinese doctors prescribe them for stomach ulcers and hyperacidity. So no more jokes about Chinese eggs please!

Third-class passengers, emigrants for Brazil, live well in the Dutch liners. Most of the queer foods they have known at home are here in the store-

rooms of the *Boissevain*. I saw tubs filled with sprouting beans; ducks' feet and lotus root; water chestnuts to flavour pork and chicken stews; oyster sauce and shrimp sauce. Here, too, were packets of the white shavings which make birds' nest soup, another widely-misunderstood delicacy. This is really a seaweed protein, partly digested by certain seabirds nesting on the Pacific islands. It is regarded as useful treatment for stomach troubles.

Yes, there are two worlds within the large black hull of the *Boissevain*. They meet only when a party is held for every child in the ship. I thought that I had watched every form of deck game possible at sea until I saw tiny Eastern and Western children, guided by kindly Dutch officers, taking part in such contests as the cherry pick race and the chop stick race.

Every passenger liner has its daily mileage sweepstake, bingo and bridge, travel films and "horse races", deck tennis and quoits. A custom on board ships of the Royal Interocean Lines which I shall remember gratefully is the gift each passenger receives – a well-designed plastic writing case filled with airmail notepaper and envelopes. The *Boissevain* is also the only ship I have ever known which places deep armchairs not only in the public-rooms but on deck, and which serves free Chinese ginger after dinner on Sunday nights.

It was not like this on the Grey Funnel Line, rolling down to Rio nearly forty years ago.

Five in the morning, and I am on the bridge of the *Boissevain* approaching Rio de Janeiro for the second time in

my life. What can a Rip van Winkle expect to find, what youthful impressions have survived?

All our minds have attics where lost memories are stored. To me, the most dramatic phase of this return to Rio will be the stirring up of memories which would never have re-entered the conscious mind. At the moment I do not know how these memories will return, but I await with confidence the re-creation of the Rio of my youth.

Five in the morning, and I am glad when the Chinese steward brings coffee. Now I can see the tropic isles on Rio's doorstep, uninhabited save one with a lighthouse. Seabirds are plunging into seething patches of fish. Through the binoculars I can pick out the line of Copacabana skyscrapers, like white lumps of sugar along the sandy beach.

Sunrise, and the *Boissevain* plunges into a bowl of mountains holding a huge, shimmering bay. We have glimpsed cool, seaside Rio; now here is the hot city strung out for miles between the jagged mountains and the water. Everyone knows these peaks by name, just as the voyager reaching Table Bay knows Lion's Head and Devil's Peak. Everyone can see the statue of Christ on the Corcovado, the "hunchback" mountain, and the cable-way up the granite Sugar Loaf of a million photographs. Over there is Tijuca and the rain forest where the blue butterflies hover over your car. Already you can see the Brazilian jungle, and you can understand why air liners that come down in that jungle may be lost for ever as surely as aircraft that fall into the ocean.



The line of Copacabana skyscrapers, like white lumps of sugar along the sandy beach.

Once they handed every newcomer to Rio a free cup of coffee on the wharf. You have to pay two pence for the coffee now, and you may need it before entering the jungle of the city. For you will soon learn that Rio has too many people. "Life is too fast here for a person from Europe," my Portuguese friend Francisco informed me.

Francisco met me at eight in the morning, and at three the next morning he was driving me back to the *Boissevain*. After a second crowded day with Francisco I knew exactly what he meant but I did not care. One can sleep at sea. In Rio one lives.

Rio satisfies my lifelong desire for interesting streets. Passenger liners tie up at the Praca Maua, which is a park at the foot of Rio's main street, the Avenida Rio Branco. All through the years the name of that street had rung

in my storehouse of memories like a carnival bell. I walked down the full length of the Avenida again with Francisco and tried to recover my youth.

Avenida Rio Branco! I missed the Palace Hotel, where I had lived much too expensively at the age of twenty. I could not find the Central Cafe, where the naval ratings drank beer or coffee and watched an orchestra of women musicians. At the lower end of this southern Champs Elysees the shipping offices and shops seemed to have escaped the craze for demolition which is typical of Rio. (They pulled down six hundred buildings to make the modern Avenida, with its width of more than one hundred feet.) I noticed that the pavements still rivalled Lisbon's mosaics, and that one still approached the naval club over a

design of anchors and tridents. At night the lights of the Avenida Rio Branco may be sighted by ships twenty miles offshore.

Old Rio is more easily discovered in the side-streets. First I would place the celebrated Rua Ouvidor, the “road of the goldsmiths”, a narrow street for leisurely strollers where no vehicle may enter. Ouvidor has its jewellers and also its bookshops and cafes. Many of these cafes display a stack of sugar cane at the entrance. Select a thick stalk, hand it to the girl behind the counter, and she will pass it through a pressing machine which transforms it into the non-alcoholic drink called *caldo de cana*. If you prefer rum, there is a cafe in the Rua Ouvidor which claims that two thousand different rum drinks are available. Take my advice and stick to

iced *maté* in the daytime, the great Brazilian herb drink.

Now here is the Praça Monte Castelo, another picturesque corner. Here are dealers in medicinal herbs, wine shops and grocers and fruit-dealers and pet-shops. Puppies lie in cages eyeing noisy, gaudy *arara* parrots with red and blue feathers. Tiny green turtles swarm in hundreds in and out of the water of their tanks. A rare grey parrot may be bought for eight thousand *cruzeiros* (about sixteen pounds), while little green parrots from the Amazon cost only six shillings each. Here are thousands of birds, from pigeons to parakeets. Here are playful monkeys eating bananas, and Siamese cats looking as though they would like to eat the birds.

Do not miss the old low street called Rua Acre, near the waterfront, for this

is where the wholesale produce dealers carry on business in the open air. Nearly every man you meet has a sample of beans or rice, while Portuguese *bacalhau* and huge Brazilian cheeses decorate the doorways.

Rua Buenos Aires is the street of the bankers, and here also is a sight no woman should miss – the Rio flower market. I wished that I had a botanist beside me to name those hothouse flowers and roses. All I can tell you is that orchids may be had for a few shillings apiece. Close to the flower market is another street for women, Gonsalves Dias, the street of fashion houses. It is so dark and narrow that you would not suspect the high-priced creations hidden here.

If you should yearn for a hot breath of the Brazilian jungle that devoured Colonel Fawcett and many other less

famous, you can have it easily enough. Rio is on the edge of the jungle. Take a taxi to the outer suburbs, and the jungle begins where the last street ends. Snakes creep into gardens (as at Sea Point) and incredible butterflies drop into the soup.

Another way of finding the Amazon without leaving Rio is to walk through the great lush Jardim Botânico with its royal palms one hundred feet high. These are foreign trees, planted by Emperor Don Joao VI early last century and now forming the most spectacular palm avenue in the world. Elsewhere you will encounter Amazon growths of unbelievable sizes: a forest of giant bamboos; a pool of Victoria Regia lilies with leaves twenty feet in circumference and capable of floating a baby; a fisherman in stone and a replica of his reed hut beside the river.

Here, too, are hothouses bursting with carnivorous plants and orchids. This is indeed a jungle flourishing within a city.

Are you still hungry for the savage Brazil that swallows up explorers? Opposite the highly-civilised Rio sports stadium (which seats two hundred thousand people) there is the Indian Museum. Brazil still has Indian tribes so wild that no contact has ever been made with them. These are the people who shrink human heads to the size of an orange without losing the horrified expression on the victim's face. One good and genuine example of this reprehensible art is to be found soon after you enter the Indian Museum. I thought of Butch Larsen as I gazed in horror upon the shrunken head, and felt glad that Butch had failed to secure one for me.

This museum also preserves the equipment carried by famous but ill-fated Brazilian explorers who plunged boldly into the jungle. Search parties recovered their navigating instruments, their old cameras and wooden cine-cameras. You can inspect the very arrow, tipped with curare which penetrated the stomach of one of the men who ventured too far. A death mask of the explorer adds to the horror. When you have seen this museum you do not wonder what happened to Colonel Fawcett. You know, only too well.

Before leaving I paused before a huge map of Matto Grosso (meaning "great jungle"), the unknown province of Brazil. This is the sort of country which has always attracted me in Africa, though the unknown in Africa, in my experience, has usually meant

deserts. I shall never know the secret of Matto Grosso, yet I can still feel the spell of a map like that, with its vast spaces glimpsed by white men only from the air, Matto Grosso !

Another vision of the mysterious interior, a far more pleasant interlude. I advise you strongly to enter the shop called Zitrin, opposite the flower market, in the Rua Buenos Aires.

Zitrin of Rio is probably the leading curio dealer in South America. I am giving him this mention because of an intelligent woman assistant who took me round the shop and revealed a wide knowledge of the queer merchandise. She showed me blue shades of aquamarines more valuable than diamonds; zircons and golden topaz; green, red, yellow tourmalines; and the lovely amethyst which they call La Amatista in Brazil. You can buy ashtrays of

agate and rose quartz, tables of jacaranda wood inlaid with ivory, heads carved with great artistry from the Brazilian hardwoods.

Then we came to butterflies by the thousand. Brazilian craftsmen have a way of imprisoning dead butterflies under glass without losing the brilliant colours of the outspread wings. They make butterfly trays and ashtrays, and mount rare butterflies in frames so that collectors may gaze upon these blazing wonders of the jungle as connoisseurs of painting might admire the work of the master.

Zitrin also has rare birds that rival the butterflies in beauty. He will sell you a tiny stuffed alligator, a necklace of alligator's teeth, a comb of the dark Brazilian turtle shell, or a musical coconut that rattles with the seeds they call "tears of our mother in heaven".

He has dolls and daggers, hardwood salad bowls, lampshades of Parana pine; his shop is filled with the essence of Brazil.

Strangest of all the oddities on Sit-in's shelves was a little head which reminded me all too vividly of the Indian Museum exhibit. "Surely it can't be" ... I began.

Zitrin's assistant smiled. "You are right. Such things are now forbidden by all the South American governments, as a demand for human heads by tourists might possibly lead to a supply. No, this is a little monkey with human hair – just a clever imitation of the real thing."

I nearly bought it to show my friend Butch, but I decided that I did not want even a shrunken monkey's head in my baggage.

Rio is a city with certain peculiarities. Water mains were laid so long ago that some of the plans have been lost, and there is great difficulty in supplying new buildings with water. Often a water main is discovered only when it bursts. Water shortage is a cruel problem, and people in luxurious flats rise when the water comes on at one in the morning to fill their baths with drinking water. I saw trucks pumping water into office skyscrapers to keep the lavatory and air-conditioning systems going. In a dry summer, Rio croaks for water.

I am sure that Rio's most shocking contrast is to be found where the great blocks of flats lie cheek by jowl with the hillside slums known as *favelas* because they resemble honeycombs. These shanty towns, overcrowded with the descendants of African slaves, are

composed of gay-looking plaster shacks with red tiled roofs; ugly only when you see the living conditions of the negroes. Palms rise from the teeming huts. Flowers and fruit are grown amid squalor. Music comes from mud walls; the samba music that goes round the world. Yes, there is musical genius in the *favelas*, a blend of Africa and Brazil, and when the seeds rattle in the calabash all Rio dances. I heard their drums and whistles at night; they were beating their kettles and pans, working up for the great March carnival when the bombs of perfume and ether would burst in every street.

Nearly all the performers at “Night and Day”, the most expensive Rio night club, were negroes. I sat there enthralled long after two in the morning as they raced through their

latest show. Grande Othelo, the comedian, Linda Batista the singer, the sisters Marinho – here was Rio’s own talent flourishing in its home town. Rio claims the most famous carnival in the world, and the negroes have made it.

There was a carnival spirit about “Night and Day” when I was there, for they were singing the 1960 carnival songs. Onion soup and negro dancers and whisky at three pounds a bottle. That is Rio.

Those who travel in search of new foods and unknown wines (as I do) will discover a world of fresh experience in South America. Even more surprising is the fact that memorable meals are not expensive. You can dine in some of the finest restaurants in Buenos Aires, Rio de Janeiro and Montevideo at no more than ten

shillings a head, including wine and service.

I have the menus before me. First there was that splendid lunch high above Rio in the air-conditioned restaurant of the department store called Mesbla. Try a Brazilian gin and tonic for it has a certain flavour. Then order *aziete de dendé*, fish done in coconut oil and served with creamed rice. You will never forget it.

Next day my friend Francisco took me to a saloon in the Rua Sao Bento, near the waterfront, where Brazil's national dish is served to perfection. This is the famous yet simple *feijoada completa*, black beans with salt pork, spiced sausage, onions and tomatoes, garlic and other tasty oddments. Rice is cooked and served separately. Sprinkle manioc flour over the mixture.

Try a cautious little glass of the Brazilian rum known as *cachaca* with your *feijoada* (pronounced "fay-joo-arda"), but do not blame me if it registers like a depth charge and gives you a ravenous appetite.

As I gazed in wonder on the new Rio all through the first day of my return, I struggled to bring that old Rio of mine out of the attic, and I failed. Something was missing but when evening came I stopped in my tracks, excited, and inhaled the night air. The years fell away, and I saw the faces I had been striving to remember; the friends of my youth and the scenes that had gone.

"What is it – that aroma?" I asked Francisco. He was baffled and silent for a minute, and my mind was far away. I saw the Paris Club that I had forgotten, the roulette tables, and an



As I gazed in wonder on the new Rio all through the first day of my return, I struggled to bring that old Rio of mine out of the attic, and I failed.

apache dance performed with such abandon that the smack, smack, smack which the woman received must have been heard outside in the street. Why had I forgotten such a spectacle? Possibly because Rio was full of such bizarre entertainment in those days; it was the old, wild Rio, a vicious Rio as everyone knows who was there years ago.

Then I smelt the mysterious aroma again. I saw a seaman throwing a bread roll at a parrot in a bar, knocking the cursing parrot off its perch. I saw the old Rio, the twisting streets of colonial Rio, and a billiard ball hurtling out of a window and smashing the glass portico of a pavement cafe. What meaningless scenes the memory stores away! I saw the stacks of breadfruit, and the pineapples they call *abacaxi*, and the

bright oranges in the old market which is now being pulled down.

“What is it, Francisco?” I asked again, for this was magic and I must know the answer.

“You mean the strong scent between a violet and a pansy,” Francisco replied at last. “Look at that tree and you have it.” Of course. It was the tree with the light blue flower which opens only in the evening, Rio’s own *dame de la note*, the “Lady of the night”. A flower had unlocked the past, more of it than I can tell you.

Some people say that Santos comes as an anti-climax after the thousand pleasures of Rio de Janeiro. Santos is a port of call for ships of the Royal Inter-ocean Lines, and I would urge the tourist to see Santos before rushing away up-country to fabulous Sao

Paulo. A city of three hundred thousand people may seem a little quiet when you have left Rio of three million only a night's journey away. Nevertheless, the observant traveller will find much to do in Santos.

Santos stands on a flat island separated from the green jungle of the mainland by a narrow channel. One Sunday morning I walked for hours through the shanty town where the stevedores live. The wooden huts, some of them on stilts, seemed poor indeed compared with the stately modern skyscrapers on the seafront. Yet the shabbiest huts had marvellous gardens. There is something to be said for a climate in which everyone can grow his own bananas and tropical fruits with ease.

The *Boissevain* was moored within a few minutes' walk of the municipal market. A canal links the market with

the deep-water channel, and many small farmers arrive by motor-boat from the mainland with their produce. This is the place to see the wealth of Brazil's seas and soil.

I saw great heaps of tunny and prawns and shrimps and fish I had never set eyes upon before, ugly whiskered fish and fish like rainbows. Some of the finest vegetables in the world come to this market. I wished that I could paint the tomatoes and palm "cabbage" and superb purple egg plants in the true colours. Here were the tiny limes in which the Satiates "cook" their fish; here were pomegranates and avocado pears and enormous carrots; and here, too, were the housewives of Santos doing their Sunday morning shopping.

In the hot weather, all Santos lives in its gardens and streets. Every tree has bird-cages hung on the branches.

Radios are taken outside. Thousands listen to the *futebol* broadcasts amid the aroma of their own orchids and hibiscus and bougainvillea. Most of the shops stand wide-open, food shops apparently bursting with rice and beans, garlic and sausages.

Santos is the world's coffee capital. Coffee, raw coffee, gives an aroma to the wharves and streets of Santos. Sacks of coffee pass through the warehouses by the million. Every office has a pleasant atmosphere of roasting coffee. Walk through the harbour area and you crush the grey coffee beans underfoot, enough for many a pot. A beachcomber could live on the unwanted bananas and coffee and other tropical foods that lie strewn about the cobbled Santos waterfront.

Many business firms in Rio and Santos have discovered that it pays

them to provide their staffs with free coffee. Little cups of strong black coffee, half-filled with very fine sugar, come round at half-past nine in the morning and again before the lunch break, which is at eleven in Brazil. Immediately after lunch your boss presents you with another exquisite cup of coffee, and a fourth cup arrives shortly before you go home. Some firms give six cups a day.

Coffee firms in Santos are the most generous of all, for every man and woman in the building has eight free cups a day. Coffee keeps the office-worker at work. Government servants, who receive no free coffee, spend most of their time in the coffee shops. *Caramba!* Without incessant coffee and cigarettes, life in Brazil would not be worth living. Brazilians laugh at the

idea that lots of coffee may be bad for you.

Brazilian coffee is not the finest in the world, but it is the second or third best. Production is enormous, and at one period they were burning coffee in railway engines. Now the government is buying the surplus and selling it at a lower price to the coffee roasters in the hope of encouraging Brazilians to drink more coffee. I fail to see how a Brazilian could drink more coffee, but that is the official policy.

I went to the firm of Alves, Silva, coffee exporters of Santos, to see how the coffee graders carry out their difficult task. Decisions which depend on the human nose, palate and throat always fascinate me. I have watched the wine tasters, the perfume experts, the tea merchants and other specialists at work. Now here were the high

priests of the coffee industry ready to show their skill.

Senhor Rui do Carmo Costa was my first guide, a young, English-speaking Indian from Portuguese Goa, educated in Bombay. (Brazil as you know, is nothing if not cosmopolitan). Costa explained that no coffee was grown within one hundred miles of Santos; and this I realised, for the green bushes flourish in the state of Sao Paulo, on the highlands beyond the blue wall of the Serra do Mar. There the coffee *fazendas* cover five million acres. After two centuries of coffee growing it is no wonder that Brazil is producing thirty million bags a year; far more than any other country.

“Sao Paulo coffee, known to the world as Santos coffee, is very good coffee indeed,” Costa declared. “I must admit, however, that Jamaica – and the

Central American republics such as Colombia, produce finer coffees, and I will tell you why. Coffee growing in Columbia, and in the famous Blue Mountain area of Jamaica, is a family affair. Plantations are small, the ripe berries are hand-picked, and the drying is carried out skilfully. In Brazil, some pickers run their hands along the branches, dragging off perfect and imperfect berries and damaging the branches. However, the Brazilian growers are being taught better ways and certain faults may be corrected by grading and blending.”

Coffee firms usually employ two graders, one much older than the other. When hundreds of cups have to be tasted in a day, the older man becomes tired; but his experience is always available, and the younger man has the stamina to carry on.

Nine times out of ten, when the two graders compare results, they are in complete agreement. You can blind-fold them, give them coffee from any part of Brazil, and they will name the province and place the beans in the correct grade. They call the tasting process “cupping”, and it was entirely different from the method I had imagined.

Santos firms roast the beans to a light brown colour for tasting purposes. The beans are ground immediately and freshly-boiled water is used to prepare coffee by the “sock” process. It is weak, unsweetened coffee, and the water is allowed to cool before the grader starts work. So there is no pleasure in coffee-tasting. Graders love coffee, but it has to be prepared in the conventional way before they can

enjoy it – a dark roast, served hot with sugar.

Graders sit at a round table with dozens of cups of this weak, cool coffee in front of them, and dozens of little bowls of raw coffee beans. Very often they can grade the coffee merely by smelling the beans; and the “cupping” confirms their opinion.

When the coffee is taken into the mouth it is sucked up violently, with a noise like steam, so that the liquid not only reaches the palate but also the back of the throat. No genteel sipping in this game, you observe. A grader at work can be heard right down the corridor. It is such a quick intake that a hot cup of coffee would put the grader out of business for the rest of the day. Only in this peculiar way can the quality of the coffee be judged. They spit out the coffee, wash out their

mouths with water, and suck in the next cup.

An American grader in another firm informed me that South Africa’s taste in coffee was neither the best nor the worst in the world. You may be surprised to learn that epicurean France takes much cheaper grades of coffee than South Africa. “Any old stuff will do for France as they spoil it with chicory anyway,” remarked a grader.

I asked all the Santos experts how to make good coffee, and I was glad when they all insisted on the method I have used for years. No percolators. No glass outfits. No electric gadgets. No boiling in saucepans. Just a simple filter.

“Drip coffee brings out the flavour as no other method will do,” declared the

high priests of the world's coffee capital. "Use a dark roast, grind as much as you need freshly every day, and pour freshly-boiled water over it. A paper filter or the old fashioned sock gives you perfect coffee."

Now for the run to Sao Paulo, fifty miles by rail from Santos and one of the most sensational railway journeys in the world outside Switzerland.

Take the 9.45 a.m. express to Sao Paulo if you are wise, and plunge into the great Brazilian jungle. (A steward will come round with coffee, ham rolls, sugar sticks and tonic water in case you have missed your breakfast.) Kipling made this trip and wrote of it. The most hardened traveller will never be bored.

At first the diesel engine carries you over the flat coastal plain with its

panorama of swamps and banana plantations, banana barges on the Rio Grande, ox-carts on the roads. Within half an hour you have reached the great escarpment of the Serra do Mar, and here you marvel at the skill of the British engineers who built this mountain railway nearly a century ago.

The line was carried by tunnels and bridges, along cliffs and up gradients so steep that at one point the locomotive is detached and steel cables draw the train. You climb nearly three thousand feet in six miles, as the singing in your ears will tell you. If you are interested in seeing railway dwellings hung on precipices, if you enjoy the sort of view that is usually seen from aircraft, this is the trip for you.

Sao Paulo, enormous and vigorous Sao Paulo, bursts on the traveller as Johannesburg might do after a swift journey from East London. Sao Paulo of course, dwarfs Johannesburg in many ways. It has three million people, and the skyline is regarded by architects as the most spectacular in the world outside the United States.

Indeed, one goes to Sao Paulo mainly to gaze upon the modern architecture of the fastest-growing city in the world. You can find pictures of the famous skyscrapers in publicity folders; the bank of thirty-two storeys rising for more than five hundred feet; the Matarazzo building covered with white marble. I was most impressed by a sight every tourist does not see, a pair of offices built for a successful father and son. These office suites may easily be the most expensive, most

luxurious on earth. They were marvels of timber and leather, and both were equipped with enormous marble desks. Air-conditioned, of course. A secretary served me with a drink from a secret refrigerator. Both suites had marble bathrooms fit for a palace.

Then there was the sports club with three thousand members where I had lunch. Hollywood never devised a film set so gorgeous as that dream building of huge windows and blue leather armchairs. At lunch sweet melon and smoked ham were served together as an appetiser, in the Spanish manner. Then came a shrimp omelette with a white Brazilian wine from Rio Grande do Sul, and certainly not to be despised. Others in the party ordered *empadinhas de camarao*, patties composed of shrimps, olives and hearts of palm baked in a light pastry.

I rounded off the meal with the typical guava sweet accompanied by hard white cheese. Then came the coffee, the superb coffee, a story and a poem in itself.

Sao Paulo owes its progress to a refreshing climate. Business executives hold board-meetings at seven in the morning. There are fifteen thousand industrial plants, some of them bearing famous British names. And, of course, the state of Sao Paulo produces one-quarter of the world's coffee.

It is a monster, but a fascinating one. All the nations have their colonies there. You can take your aperitif on the pavement outside a French cafe, eat ravioli with Sao Paulo's millions of Italians or taste at Nova Tokiwa the national dishes of the quarter million Japanese. Tired of these places? Casa Anglo Brasileira will give you English

food, Almanara is an Arabic restaurant, Hungaria and Hong Kong speak for themselves, while Zillertal is Austrian. Many foreigners remind themselves of their homelands by building villas with Portuguese tiles or Moorish arches, the timbered homes of Germany or the lawns and rose-gardens of England.

Amid all these wonders Sao Paulo has had the sense to preserve a genuine relic of the early eighteenth century. This is the Casa do Bandeirante, an early settler's house with walls of rammed earth. Twelve rooms have been furnished in keeping with the period. You can see where the master hid his gold and silver, gunpowder and salt, between the board ceiling and the roof of his room. Jacaranda beds and tables, hammocks, strong-boxes and spinning wheels are among the

antiques. The *bandeirantes* were the adventurers who roamed the interior in search of slaves and gold. They found some of the wealth of Brazil, but only in recent years has Sao Paulo become the fastest growing city in the world.

It is time to rejoin the *Boissevain* at Santos. Take to the road now, the smooth highway called Via Anchieta. This is a faster route than the railway. In places the engineering reminded me of the Alpine passes. Motor-coaches are timed between the police posts, so that careful driving is the rule.

I hope you will leave Santos in daylight, for the three miles of the channel give you modern Brazil and primitive Brazil; tall buildings as handsome as any in Rio, and the jungle of the rattlesnakes. Use your days wisely and you will be sorry to say good-bye to Santos.

Chapter Twenty-Eight

RIVER PLATE

RIO DE LA PLATA has a grand ring about it, the “river of silver” of the old Spanish explorers who thought it would carry them to untold wealth. “Water of chocolate” would be a more fitting name for the muddy yet not unromantic stream which I saw from the deck of the Dutch liner *Boissevain* recently on my South American cruise.

Of course the River Plate is not a river at all, but the broad, shallow estuary of two great tropical rivers, the Uruguay and the Parana. It is the gateway to two memorable cities, Montevideo at the mouth and Buenos Aires a hundred miles upstream.

Uruguay, of which Montevideo is capital, is a small, flat country. “It

crouches warily between its two great neighbours, the Argentine and Brazil,” a resident pointed out to me. Montevideo has one hill, however, the Cerro from which you can see the spot where the *Admiral Graf Spee* was scuttled. When the first Spaniards arrived, a sailor called out: “*Monte Video!*” (I see a hill.) So the place received its name. Now it is the home of nearly nine hundred thousand people, one-third of Uruguay’s population.

It is clean. Some kindly visitors have called Uruguay the “Denmark of South America”, which is going too far. Nevertheless, Uruguay has some wise laws and the Uruguayans are not robbed by their rulers to the same extent as the people of certain other republics.

Montevideo seems low and small after Rio, and indeed there are only three

high buildings in the city. But its beaches and seaside resorts, the lovely Playa Ramirez and Focitos, Playa de las Ingleses, Carrasoo, Punta del Este and Maldonada, these are all Muizenbergs of South America, drawing thousands in summer from the far interior.

Among the first impressions formed by the visitor is the age of the motor-cars. I saw all the cars I had ever owned in Montevideo, starting with the Ford model "T". This was no veterans' parade, however but the natural result of a shortage of foreign exchange. Ancient flat-topped vehicles make a queer foreground against the skyscrapers of modern bathing beaches.

Utopia on the Plate? No, I disagree strongly. Most of the electricity was cut off while I was there, iced drinks

were hard to find, few lifts were working and people were standing in queues waiting for bread. At the casinos the gambling had stopped because punters like something more than candlelight when large sums of money are lying about. Some said it was all due to a drought; but others thought there had been bungling in high places. I must go back to Montevideo when the lights are turned on.

This little republic does force the employer to treat his workers properly. Not even the domestic servant has been forgotten, for she is legally entitled to a swim every afternoon in summer. Factory workers must be provided with chairs. There are pensions for all, and it is customary for men to retire at fifty.

Montevideo has been called the “city of roses”. In the El Prado park I might have seen the finest rose garden in the world, with eight hundred varieties. It was the wrong time of year. I must go back in November.

Please do not imagine from these remarks that I disliked Uruguay. It is a good land with a reasonable climate. When you drive out to Punta del Este there are long stretches almost exactly like the Cape countryside. Eucalyptus trees, acacias, vineyards, and other growths remind you that Montevideo and Cape Town are on the same latitude. Montevideo is surrounded by small holdings and wine estates. You may also see the gauchos driving the splendid cattle into the pens of the *frigoríficos*.

After such a brief encounter I shall not attempt to sum up the gaucho, the

South American cowboy. Two slight memories linger. I met a group of gauchos who had won a prize of one million pesos in the lottery a year or so ago. They had spent the lot, and now they were happily driving cattle again, posing for photographs on horseback, and accepting gifts of cigarettes.

Gauchos love gambling and drinking. It was outside Montevideo that I saw, for the first time in my life, a bar where a gaucho on horseback could be served almost at the gallop. It was in a street where the gauchos passed regularly with their cattle. The bar counter was outside the inn, at saddle height, so that the rider could dash alongside fling down his money and gulp his drink without losing touch with his cattle. I gathered that they had to have their pesos ready, as a barman cannot easily overtake a gaucho.

Uruguayan beef is equal to the Argentine product, and even the poor can afford superb steaks. If you go to the Hotel Victoria Plaza, one of the few tall buildings, there is a glass kitchen where you can watch the chefs at work. A choice of nearly one hundred sauces is offered with the *bifes* in the grillroom of this hotel.

So here at last is the tender and luscious beef of the pampas, the finest meat on earth. I gave a dinner for seven at Morini's restaurant, and I see from the bill that we started with *caña*, a variety of rum. Some of us tried the octopus, which is as popular in South America as it is along Mediterranean shores. Then came the steaks, each one so enormous that it might have formed the whole meal in a careful family. Follow the South American custom and eat your grilled steak

without potatoes or vegetables. A green salad properly dressed, with a hint of garlic, will suffice; and that is also the way to keep your weight down.

With that first steak I ordered a red Chilean wine. Chile is the only producer of quality wine in South America, for the climate is right along the colder western slopes of the Andes. Chilean wines may be compared with good Portuguese, Spanish and Cape wines. Argentine vineyards produce thirteen million hectolitres of wine a year, much of it for non-critical palates in the United States. Some of the Argentine growths are pleasant, and all are inexpensive. Chile remains the aristocrat of the Andes.

I expected a large bill after that feast in Montevideo, for the Restaurant Morini is a fashionable place in spite

of the sawdust, and we had washed the meat down in no mean way. However, the total cost including service worked out at less than five pounds.

On a Sunday morning in Montevideo look out for the street fairs. Every suburb has its own fair, and you can buy not only farm produce but anything from old silver to a stuffed parrot.

Places to avoid (so a cynical Montevidean guide informed me) are the so-called *whiskerías*. Even the whisky is unreliable. Young ladies with luminous lipstick saunter up to you in the semidarkness uttering the magic words: "Drink for Gloria." It costs a lot to slake Gloria's thirst. Montevideo has been described as "a sleepy little provincial town compared with Rio or Buenos Aires", but it pays to remain wide awake in the *whiskerías*.

South Africans should see the ox-wagon monument by Jose Belloni in the Parque Battle y Ordóñez. It is a tribute to the pioneers, the *voortrekkers* of Uruguay; and the monument consists of a covered wagon drawn by six pairs of oxen; the team master whip in hand, urging the oxen forward to free the wagon from a soft patch. This is a city of statues, and you can find world-famous men from Columbus to Einstein. I must say that the straining oxen are more impressive.

As you move away from Montevideo westwards up the River Plate, do not expect scenery. It is so wide that you might often imagine you are at sea; and seldom are both shores visible. The approach to Buenos Aires is like coming in to land from the ocean.

Passenger liners dock first at the Darsena Norte, a fine basin with many yachts, offering a view of the city's skyline. Those who have been to Chicago see a strong resemblance.

So here is another city to study, a city of six million people, the largest city south of the line. At first glance the street map seems like an immense gridiron. Yet it is possible to observe a great city, to find the differences, to reach the heart of it.

I walked down the gangway and came soon to the open-air market near the Retiro railway station. As I sauntered past the stalls, my reading came to life. Millions of Italians were represented by the sheets of ravioli, the typical cheeses and sausages and cannellonis. Here was an abundance of wine and meat, fruit and other foods that spoke of a rich land, a hot jungle on the north

and then the plains flowing like an ocean of grass to the ice in the south.

Now I am in the Plaza Britanica, with its clock tower to remind the *porteños*, the citizens of Buenos Aires of the part Britain played in opening the country. In the Retiro station I can see for myself the railway laid by British engineers with surplus material soon after the Crimean War; which explains the Russian gauge of five feet. Travellers kneel before a shrine, something I have never seen in a railway station before.

Retiro is filled with showcases displaying fine leather goods, alligator skins made up in many forms, snakeskins and armadillos; the lovely nutria fur in white and brown and gold. Indeed these showcases prove that the Argentine can produce more things than the finest beef in the

world, many sorts of luxuries and necessities.

Refreshment stalls at Retiro offer much better coffee than you will find in certain railway stations I know. Ham-rolls are sold by the thousand. I am told that at four in the morning, Retiro is filled with flowers, but I seldom rise at four nowadays. However, I have seen the most interesting railway station in the Argentine.

Close by is the *subterraneo*, the underground railway, stations decorated tastefully with Argentine scenes made up of majolica tiles. London's "tuppenny tube" is a memory, but the *subterraneo* will take you anywhere in Buenos Aires for a couple of pesos. You may also dive into the *subterraneo* and seek the *cambio* counter if you need small change.

Buenos Aires! I shall remember the number seven 'bus from the docks, full of good-humoured men ready to help the newcomer. I recall one-horse buggies and chimney-sweeps riding bicycles and wearing top-hats. French bakery wagons and long French loaves. Men on tricycles selling cages of cardinals and parakeets. Basque milkmen with berets, their horses adorned with fine brass. Traffic police in safe, shaded boxes, raised above the street like the crow's nest on a ship's mast. 'Buses driven by *asesinos*, a local nickname which seems ill-deserved. I thought the traffic moved slowly in Buenos Aires, and I saw no accidents. This must have been the last of the world's great cities to adopt traffic lights, because no one thought they would be obeyed. In fact, the drivers respect the lights.

If you notice a new motor-car in Buenos Aires then it must belong to some rich or influential person, or to a visitor from one of the wild southern provinces where good cars are permitted as a necessity. Ordinary *porteños* have to pay a duty of five hundred per cent or just hang on to the old car long after it has fallen apart. Argentina, like Uruguay, has no money to spare for imported motor-cars.

It seems that any car is better than no car, even though you have to pay six pounds for a set of sparking plugs. My friend Percy Taylor owned a twenty-year-old American car for which he had just refused an offer of fourteen hundred pounds. Yet taxi-drivers will carry you a long way for a couple of shillings. Petrol is cheap.

Buenos Aires has many sounds, from castanets to the champing of cavalry horses. Yet there is one sound you will seldom hear, the hooting of motor-cars. The law against stupid hooting is enforced. There is a fine of about seventeen shillings.

I also admired the suburban streets lined with bitter orange trees. They provide shade for all and marmalade for those who care to pick the fruit.

Buenos Aires! Squatters in wretched settlements of wood and cardboard, surrounded by high walls to hide the poverty. As a contrast, Belgrano, rich suburb of British and American executives; and the Vila Ana Maria, home of the Dilligenti quintuplets. Their father, a wealthy Italian, sends each child to a different school, but all the schools are English.

Buenos Aires! Even in death there are some who are surrounded by wealth. This is the fantastic Recoleta cemetery, with its family vaults on which fortunes have been spent. One vault has an electric lift to carry the coffins down to the seventy niches. Another vault has an electric bell which rings in the depths every afternoon at three-fifteen, the time at which the occupant died. If you are interested in the furniture of death, and other people's ideas of glorifying the dead, then you should see the statues, the golden ornaments the marble tombs, the silver vases, the onyx windows, the costly coffins of Recoleta cemetery. I came away with a strong impression that the money might have been put to better use.

Buenos Aires has two thousand streets. Here are those that linger in

my memory because of their sights and pleasures ...

Avenida de Mayo, the main street, home of *La Prensa* and other great newspapers. This old street, once the pride of Buenos Aires, leads to the Casa Rosada, the pink government palace, where you may see the changing of the guard in Argentinian style.

Avenida 9 de Julio, widest boulevard in the world, shaded by plane trees. The high obelisk in this street was strung with wires for a tight-rope performance which was dangerous enough even for a Buenos Aires audience. Look out for the chalet which a homesick Swiss built on top of a skyscraper. It is now a furniture shop. Below the avenue is the municipal parking area for thousands of decrepit cars.

Calle Corrientes, the theatre street and “great white way”, fashionable restaurants, *confiterias* and night clubs. A *confiteria* is the tea and sandwich place in which the *porteño* and his girlfriend pass an hour or two when the day’s work is over. Some provide music, very loud music.

Calle Florida (pronounced Ki-yee Flor-ree-dah), my favourite thoroughfare. Full of free entertainment, shopping arcades packed with interesting windows and aromas of flowers and food. Motor traffic moves out at eleven in the morning. I saw colour television here for the first time in my life.

I must not forget Avenida Santa Fe, broader than Florida, with more expensive shops and the best-dressed women; and Calle Rivadavia, claimed

by *porteños* as the longest straight street in the world.

When I return to Buenos Aires it will be in the winter. Then the Teatro Colon, the great opera house that was empty when I saw it, will be filled on gala nights with four thousand people.

Percy Taylor, that experienced *porteño* who took me round the opera, spoke wistfully of the stars he had seen there; Caruso and Patti, Barrientos, Chaliapin, Gigli and Andrea Chenier at one performance. He also remembered the night when Caruso gave of his second-best, because he was not an Europe, and was booed off the stage.

Yes, I could feel the immortal ghosts all round me in the Teatro Colon. I could hear the three stupid women whispering after Toscanini had raised his baton; and I could see Toscanini

holding up the overture and inquiring in a voice of withering politeness: "Finito?"

In season, the opera pays a staff of fifteen hundred. Out of season, a corps of sewing women repair the enormous main curtain, the thirty thousand costumes, while others look after twenty thousand wigs and enough boots and shoes for an army.

So I stood entranced on the immense stage. I gazed down at the seats, hidden behind wrought ironwork, for those in mourning. I stared up at the six tiers of boxes. I was watching a scene that is still outside my own experience.

As long as I can walk, the cities of this world will never bore me. You never know what you will find round the next corner, and this is especially true

in Buenos Aires, the "Paris of the South".

The atmosphere of France is created by the narrow, cobbled streets, shabby where they are not covered with gay signs. And the girls! I would not say they were expensively dressed but their clothes do not come off the peg. How the men love to flatter a smart girl by a stare that would be rude elsewhere. A whole street may be electrified by a well-dressed blonde. What compliments are called after her! And how coldly the proud, unsmiling girl passes, for this is part of the game.

Come down to the river bank and look out over the muddy and uninviting water. Here is the *balneario municipal*. One hundred thousand people swarm in the shallow water at the same time on hot days. Then the red flag goes up. The wind has

changed, high seas break on the embankment, all must leave the river or perish.

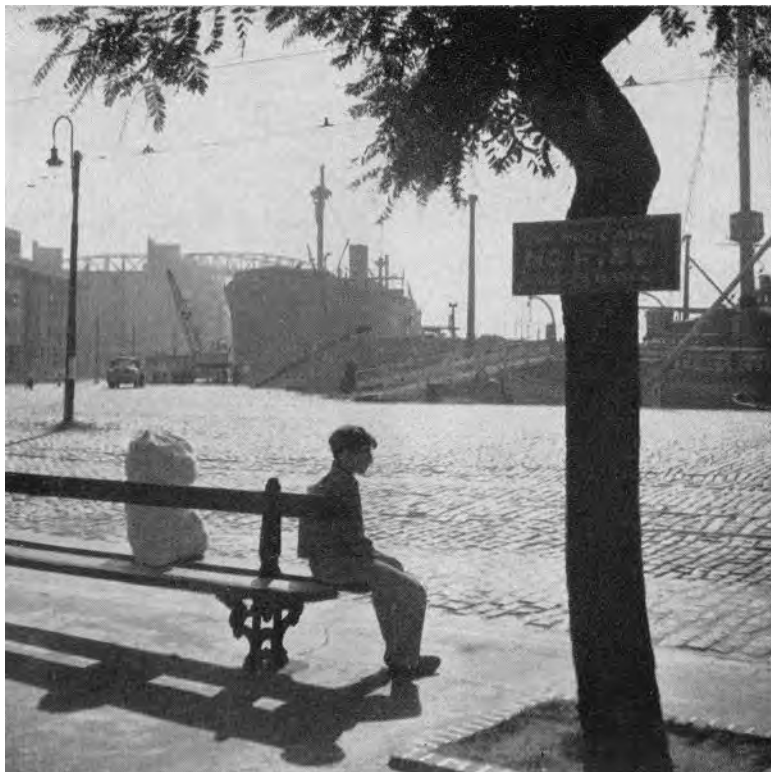
This wind is the south-easter of Buenos Aires, and it brings rain and floods the Boca. When the *pampero* comes from the west it “blows the river out,” as they say, and dredgers work night and day to deepen the approaches to the port.

Boca means “mouth”. It was the old harbour of Buenos Aires, the mouth through which all ships entered. Within living memory it was the most dangerous waterfront in the world, and also the home of the enormous “red light” district which gave the Argentine a bad name.

All the really vicious spots have vanished from the Boca, though they may have gone underground. You can

take a child there at night nowadays, and walk down the darkest street without feeling a queer twitching between the shoulders. But they still serve drinks in the Boca which I cannot recommend; “green whisky”, for example, made by filling the empty whisky casks with raw alcohol to provide a flavour.

Nevertheless, I liked La Boca. I went more than once to the art school founded by the Italian, Quinquilla Martin, for promising young Italian artists of the Boca. (This is, of course the Italian quarter of Buenos Aires.) Martin collected ships’ figureheads, carved ships and ships in bottles, and they are all there in a nautical room. Boca artists have filled the building with waterfront scenes; the fishing fleets, the flooding of the Boca which I saw for myself; the Boca carnivals,



The Boca is the old harbour of Buenos Aires. Within living memory it was the most dangerous waterfront in the world.

at which the tango was born; the dancing in the streets to the music of accordion, guitar and flute; the sail makers at work and the cock-fighting after work.

Opposite the art school is the turn in the river known as the Vuelta de Rocha, a dramatic curve filled with dead ships. It is no use scuttling an old ship at Buenos Aires, for the river is too shallow. They do not seem to know what to do with worn-out men-o'-war, decayed wooden sailing ships, obsolete river steamers and other floating junk; so a fine collection of marine antiques is to be seen on the Boca waterfront.

Here, too, is the Teatro Caminito, that narrow alley which has become an open-air theatre. Round about the theatre well-known Argentine artists and sculptors have decorated the walls

of otherwise shabby houses. People watch the plays from their balconies. It is a painted island of colour, the theatre, among acres of corrugated iron and wooden boards. I sat out a comedy called "La Zapatera Prodigiosa" without understanding a word of it. Costumes and scenery were first-class.

I dined at two Boca restaurants, El Pescadito and Bachicha. Take your sketch book to these places if you are an artist, for they have atmosphere. Apart from hundreds of wicker wine bottles, the decoration is nautical; steering wheels and starboard lights, ropes and binnacles. Casks hang from the ceiling. Tropical fish gaze upon plates loaded with ravioli and pastas.

But these are essentially sea food restaurants, and the Argentine has some interesting fish. I ordered the



They do not seem to know what to do with worn-out men-o'-war, decayed floating junk; so a fine collection of marine antiques is to be seen on the Boca waterfront.

large shrimps called *langostinos*, the mussels, and the flaky and tasty white fish, the *pejerry*, from the Rio Parana. They fry the *pejerry* in olive oil and serve it with tartar sauce. This is the salmon of the Argentine.

Try the *dorado*, too, a golden river fish. And steaks from the fresh water giant, running up to ten feet in length, the surubi. You may also enjoy the local anchovies, the silver-coloured corvina and the Chilean crabs.

It seemed to me that everyone in Buenos Aires was eating well. During the twelve days I spent there in January, water-melons were piled high on the pavements and the people were cutting them up and devouring them in the streets. The aroma of Buenos Aires is charcoal blended with meat, for in summer, in the less fashionable quarters thousands of people grill their

biftec in the open air at their front doors. Builders take raw steaks to work with them and start a fire at lunch-time.

Everyone told me that La Cabana was the finest meat restaurant in Buenos Aires. I stepped expectantly into La Cabana and lingered before the huge charcoal grill, where the enormous chef is willing to accept a tip and select your meat for you. And I knew instantly that I had reached the heart of the beef kingdom; that no other beef in my life would equal this great experience.

It was better than I expected. "Baby beef," rich with its own juices, exquisite beef that had never known the refrigerator or the deep-freeze. This is the beef that the gauchos eat at the rate of six or seven pounds a man every day. Simpson's in the Strand is

good. La Cabana in Avenida Entre Rios grills meat for the gods. Of course one does not wish to dine on grilled steak every night. I went to the Shorthorn Grill, the London Grill and other celebrated places in Buenos Aires with English and Spanish names; and I ate meat in many forms without ever encountering a tough fragment. I tried beef stew or *carbonada*, the meat pies called *empanadas*, the mixed grill or *parrillada* consisting of flesh, udder, kidneys pork sausage and blood sausage, brought to the table on little braziers and kept sizzling over the live coals.

Most interesting and most filling of all those gargantuan meals was one prepared at the old *estancia* homestead of Pinar Azul. Once this was indeed a ranch on the pampas. Now the city has

overwhelmed the place, for it is only twelve miles from Buenos Aires; but the home remains to show how the ranchers lived years ago.

Senor Carlos Luis Teyssandier and his wife and family and chef provide the genuine Argentine cuisine at Pinar Azul. You start with cocktails or sherry, eating meanwhile a *tamale* of pastry filled with sweet corn. Another drink, and this is accompanied by a spiced pork sausage in a bread roll. Take your seat at a table, and the *senoritas* place large flasks of red and white La Rioja wines before you. Now the gaucho drums are throbbing, the orchestra of guitars, accordion and piano is playing, the real feast begins.

Course one: *locro* soup of meat stock, rice, sweet corn, pumpkin, sweet potato and potato.

Course two: mixed grill.

Course three: roast mutton, the whole sheep having been done on the spit over the open fire.

Course four: roast lamb-another traditional *asado* from the spit.

Course five: roast beef from the spit, served with salad.

Course six: the Argentine sweet called *dulce de leche* of milk and fruit. And then the coffee.

Suddenly it occurred to me that I had not yet tasted *yerba maté*, the beverage of Latin America. They brewed it specially for me, boiling water poured into a gourd on to the dried green leaves of an aromatic bush. You suck it up cautiously through a silver *bombilla* tube. *Yerba maté* is said to be the most stimulating non-alcoholic

drink in the world. Gauchos drink *yerba maté* instead of eating vegetables with their meat and the liquid supplies the vitamins they need and balances their outrageous meat diet. *Yerba maté* has no harmful elements. Latin America south of Sao Paulo would collapse without this pungent, peculiar beverage. But frankly, I can live without it.

I suppose it was the music that kept everyone eating throughout this fantastic meal at Pinar Azul. The men dressed in baggy gaucho trousers, the girls in print dresses, played the small guitars of armadillo hide known as *charangos*; they also used Indian flutes. All through the meal they danced sambas and tangos, the *chacarera* and the *malambo*. After the meal they made everyone join in a wild *carnavalito* that went round the

house. Everyone but me. I had found a long chair beside the swimming pool. It was magnificent, but I hope that I shall never eat such a huge meal again as long as I live.

The shows I enjoyed in Buenos Aires were those which could be seen for the price of a glass of wine or beer. You find many such taverns in the Boca, where the strong Italian voices drift out over the water and the jumble of dead ships. In the city I went twice to La Querencia, a cafe which gives you the traditional Argentine gaucho music and dancing. El Tronio is another place with a show which goes on for hours without a single weak act. The star performer was a man who had brought the old-fashioned shadow show up to date with such artistry that the amusing creations of his bare hands seemed to live on the screen.

In a different class there is Tabaris, the leading night club, where the entertainment certainly costs more than a glass of beer. So many girls (far from undressed) appear on the stage that you can see at once why the prices are high. Here I admired another original act by a mimic who could make you believe you were watching the departure of a liner, or a military parade. He used only a microphone, as far as I could see, for his astounding effects.

When you are tired of the city of Buenos Aires you can go to the Palermo sand track on Sunday with a quarter of a million others; you can watch polo at Hurlingham or play golf in Palermo park. But my own choice would be Tigre, that astonishing river delta about forty minutes by car or train from Retiro.

Floating islands come down the Tigre and Farana rivers from the Matto Grosso in the flood seasons. They bring in snakes, and one such island long ago bore a jaguar (*tigre* in Spanish). It will be a long time before another one arrives. Meanwhile the lovers of water move about the delta in all sorts of craft, from canoes to ocean-going yachts.

Some people live very well indeed along the delta water-ways. Thousands of people dwell on fertile islands, with orchards of oranges and peaches, apples and cherries; and they catch fish at their front doors. Some go to work in the city travelling to the station by water-'bus. Tradesmen must go from house to house, island to island, by boat. In the more remote parts of the delta, many people attend a floating church which has a steeple.

Yes, I would like to live for a while on one of those islands at Tigre – Isla de la Mercedes was one that caught my eye, and El Hornero was another. Some homes stand among pines and willow and flowering Pride of India trees, and they have their own jetties and balconies hanging over the river. I saw women in bathing costumes catching eels. Everywhere there was the smoke of charcoal fires and the smell of grilled meat. They were pulling the corks out of wine bottles, too, and revealing at every turn of the river that they understood the art of living. Tigre joins my memories as yet another earthly paradise.

I should like another glimpse of the pampas outside Buenos Aires, where forests have been planted and great swimming pools created for the pleasure of *porteños* who are tired of

their city. I want to see the wayside gypsies again, the Pan American highway, and the huge air liners coming in from the north to their last landing. And the boys fishing for edible frogs in the Palermo streams. And the sleek Plaza Hotel, where a single room with bath and continental breakfast costs four pounds ten shillings a day. And the flying-boats, the last flying-boats in the world, roaring off the chocolate water to jungle destinations with names like Iguazu and Asuncion.

If you join one of the Royal Inter-ocean Line ships for a South American cruise, you live on board at Buenos Aires. Whenever I went back to the *Boissevain* for lunch, I always stopped to see what the dock workers were having. One day they lifted the lid of a steaming *puchero* stew a traditional Argentinian dish composed of beef

and chicken, peas and white beans, sausages and sweet potatoes and corn on the cob.

Once I saw them grilling whole chickens on the wharf. They laid their tables elegantly with bottles of red wine and fluted loaves. Someone plugged in a radio set, and they ate heartily to a *bandoleon* tune. After lunch there was time for coffee and a game of cards before going back to work at the slow Argentinian pace.

But there is far too much to see in Buenos Aires. After twelve days the *Boissevain* carried me away unwillingly. I felt that I was being dragged off in the middle of an open-air play in the golden evening light that only Buenos Aires knows.

Chapter Twenty-Nine

THE OCEAN TREK

AFRIKANERS have trekked northwards again and again to many parts of Africa, but only once in the story of the race has a large body of men, women and children gone into exile across a wide ocean. This was the Argentine trek after the South African War, and I have gathered details of that remarkable episode on both sides of the South Atlantic.

You do not need to endure the snows of Patagonia, where the trekkers placed many Afrikaans names on the map, to hear their tale of adventure. Many of them returned years ago, for nearly everyone born in South Africa comes home in the end. But the return of a number of the Argentine trekkers was an occasion for special rejoicing among Afrikaners, because a very

small race with a grave survival problem cannot afford to lose its members in overseas colonies as the British can.

Probably the trekkers would never have thought of the Argentine if the government of that country had not sent envoys to the Cape with an offer of farms and a settlement scheme. Many people were interested, and Louis Bauman of Ladybrand O.F.S., agreed to visit the promised land and find out whether it was suitable.

Bauman, who thus became responsible for changing the lives of many Afrikaners, was an intelligent man who spoke seven languages. He was tall and muscular, a boxer, musician and experienced sheep farmer. On arrival in Buenos Aires he bought a horse, a black Spanish cloak, and a revolver, and engaged a guide.

Bauman's languages did not include Spanish so at first he had to make signs. He and the guide embarked in a coasting steamer for Patagonia, and they were put ashore on a lonely beach where there was not a building, not a human being. A puma approached the camp fire during the night. Bauman saw the eyes and shot it with his revolver.

In the morning they rode into a country that would have sent any sheep or cattle farmer wild with delight. Water gushed up from the pampas. It was summer. Fodder plants and bushes like karoo growths covered the great plains, but it was a more generous carpet than ever Bauman had seen in the Karoo. This was a paradise, and Bauman made up his mind on the first day. Yet so remote was Patagonia early this century that he and his guide

had to wait eight weeks, drinking *yerba maté* and shooting guanacos for meat, before a ship appeared. They made smoke, and a boat came in for them.

Bauman secured a concession in Buenos Aires for seventy farms, each of three thousand five hundred hectares. When he returned to South Africa his enthusiastic description of Patagonia aroused great interest among certain Afrikaners who wished to escape from the grim after-effects of war.

I believe that the first trekkers after Bauman were two bold spirits named W. H. Watson and Pieter Visser. Watson, of British descent but born in the Transvaal, had fought for the republic during the South African War. He was captured, but escaped from the prisoner-of-war camp. In

1902 he and Pieter Visser reached the Argentine. You will hear of Watson again.

In September 1903 the main pioneer body of the Argentine trek left Table Bay in the British steamer *Cornwall* and crossed the ocean to find a new home under a republican flag. These pioneers, nearly one hundred strong included a number of "Cape rebels" from the Barkly East district. They were led by a Mr. C. J. N. Visser.

With the trekker went Ds. L. P. Vorster of Burghersdorp. He organised a congregation with C. J. N. Visser and C. P. H. Myburgh as elders and L. le Grange and P. Greyling as deacons. I understand that this was the only occasion in the history of the Afrikaner people that a congregation has been formed in midocean.

Other small parties followed the pioneers at intervals. A few trekkers took one look at remote Patagonia and hurried back to South Africa. But the Rev. L. F. Vorster decided to examine the possibilities carefully. He rode one thousand miles on horseback and confirmed the reports of this rich land across the ocean. As a result of his influence, another trek was organised which really established the Afrikaner colony on a firm basis. It was at Burghersdorp in October 1905 that one hundred trekkers gathered in their church for a farewell service.

When they prayed beside the graves of their ancestors and gazed upon their old homes, most of them must have imagined that they were seeing the familiar and beloved places for the last time. The whole village was in tears at the railway station. They sang

“Home, Sweet Home” as the train pulled out, and it was a heartbreaking parting.

Other trekkers met the Burghersdorp party in Cape Town, so that the total strength was over three hundred souls. Advocate Henry Burton (later a cabinet minister) addressed them and warned them that they were making a mistake. He suggested that they should not leave Africa and advised them to seek new homes in Rhodesia.

However, the trek fever was running high. Their leaders, Venter and Visser, had chartered the British steamer *Highland Fling* for £1800. She was more of a stable than a passenger liner, for she had been carrying horses and mules from Buenos Aires to Cape Town, and she smelt like it. Each adult paid a fare of about seven pounds for the passage. Among the trekkers were

members of the Grobler, Henning, Olivier, Coetzer and Van der Walt families. Some took their servants with them – eleven natives and a Bushman named Jacob. There were wealthy farmers among the trekkers, and one man had £30,000 with him; but most of them would have been unable to start in the new country without government help.

On arrival in Buenos Aires the government paid for board and lodging and advanced money which the trekkers spent on sheep, oxen, wagons of a strange design, ploughs and building materials. They were given free passages in a coasting steamer which landed them on December 1905 at the harbour of Comodoro Rivadavia.

When the trekkers of 1903 had arrived, Comodoro Rivadavia was

empty veld. Now there were twenty houses, a shop, an hotel, and about fifty Afrikaners living in the neighbourhood. Others had settled about sixty miles inland at a spot they had named Vrek van Dors. Among those who welcomed the latest trekkers was Dr. Krieger, who had married an Afrikaner girl while serving with the Red Cross during the South African War. Another foreigner there who had thrown in his lot with the original trekkers was Ricardi, an Italian wartime colonel in the Transvaal forces. Ricardi spoke Spanish and was of great value as interpreter.

Buenos Aires is in the latitude of Cape Town, but Comodoro Rivadavia seven hundred miles to the south, is turned into snow and mud in winter. Nearly all the native servants died, but the Bushman survived. The trekkers lived

on mutton and potatoes in winter; wives and daughters worked in the kitchens, for Patagonia could not provide them with farm or household servants. They used their huge kitchens as living rooms and warmed themselves round the large centre stove.

Small parties of Afrikaners joined the *Boerekolonie* in Patagonia after 1905. I believe the total of Afrikaners who crossed the ocean passed the thousand mark before the westward movement ceased. It was a struggle for most of them during the first quarter of a century. Snowstorms made it impossible to use the primitive tracks. In the winter of 1925 about eighty thousand sheep belonging to the Afrikaners were frozen in the snow. But the hardship to which the trekkers never became reconciled was the absence of

schools. After a time a Roman Catholic school was opened at Comodoro Rivadavia, but this did not suit them. They maintained their religion without difficulty, although a minister of the Dutch Reformed Church (a Hollander living in Buenos Aires) could visit them only twice a year. Education was another matter. They were sheep farmers, not school teachers.

Afrikaans newspapers and magazines sent by relatives in South Africa helped to keep the language alive, but reading was not enough. And even when government schools were started in Comodoro Rivadavia and Sarmiento it was necessary for each family to set up a *dorpshuis* as well as the farm homestead – as some farmers still do in South Africa. In the Argentine, however, it meant that

husbands and wives were separated for two-thirds of every year. Even now, I am told, there are few schools in the country, and thirty per cent of the people of Afrikaner stock live in Comodoro Rivadavia while their menfolk work the farms. At one time the teaching system was so poor that some Afrikaner youths learnt to read and write only while doing their military service.

For about a quarter of a century the Afrikaners looked upon Patagonia as their new permanent home. They thought wistfully of South Africa and spoke occasionally of returning; but there was only the yearning, and no mass exodus was organised. They endured many setbacks and disappointments. Not many of them secured property rights. The education problem was always with them. Yet

they might have remained in the Argentine for ever if they had not heard of the return of the Angola trekkers. With that dramatic migration before their eyes, a vague dream became a clear opportunity. They realised that they, too, would be welcome in the land of their ancestors and that the Union Government would help them.

It was a much greater undertaking, a far longer journey, for the Argentine trekkers, of course, than for the Afrikaners who returned from Angola. However, a petition was drawn up in 1929 and sent to Mr. Piet Grobler, Minister of Lands. There were about one hundred and thirty heads of families, and all but eight signed the petition.

Years passed before the repatriation movement gathered force. It became a

certainty in 1933, when Senator F. S. Malan visited the Argentine, flew to Patagonia, and interviewed the leaders. General Hertzog favoured the plan. Ministers of the Dutch Reformed Church were entrusted with the arrangements. A year or two before World War II those who had decided to return were arriving in Cape Town in batches on board the Japanese steamers then linking South America and South Africa.

Those who live out their lives in one spot on this earth may spare themselves much anguish. You will remember the weeping when the trekkers uprooted themselves from Burghersdorp, the village they never expected to set eyes on again. Now there was sadness in the new land as those who departed took their leave of members of their own families and

friends who stayed behind. Again the trekkers stood at the graves of loved ones; for by that time nearly three hundred Afrikaners had been buried in Patagonia.

Those who felt the parting most keenly were the young Afrikaners, born in the Argentine, who had never seen South Africa. They knew Afrikaans, but it was a strange dialect influenced by their Spanish-speaking neighbours, and in the Union it would stamp them immediately as newcomers. For a long time they would say *si* instead of *ja*; the word *assado* would slip out when they meant *braaivleis*, and the *poskantoor* would be *correo*. It worked out all right in the end, but I believe the Afrikaners from the Argentine passed through a more difficult period after

their homecoming than those from Angola.

Mr. O. G. Albers, secretary of the Union Legation in Buenos Aires informed me that three hundred and forty-nine Afrikaners returned to the Union from the Argentine under the church repatriation scheme. Owing to the outbreak of World War II and the manpower shortage, there was no difficulty in finding work for them.

There are still between four and five hundred Afrikaners and their descendants in Patagonia, while others have settled in Buenos Aires, Bahia Blanca, Cordoba and other places. I also heard of a small *Boerkolonie* in the Chaco, the wild corner of Paraguay where the war with Bolivia was fought some years ago. So the *trekkees* survives even when Afrikaners transplant themselves to another land.

Mr. Albers described to me the difficulties faced by the Afrikaners in Patagonia who wished to maintain some of their traditions. They were so isolated that certain families were only able to meet once a year. The Legation sent Afrikaans literature, but supplies of books, magazines and newspapers were limited and did not reach all the people.

Something has been retained, however, and this is largely due to the Dutch Reformed Church ministers who have visited the Afrikaners from time to time. The first minister from South Africa to work in Patagonia after World War I was Ds. A. J. Jacobs, and he was followed by Ds. J. J. Wassenaar and later Ds. H. J. Piek; while among visitors for short periods were Ds. J. A. Hurter, Ds. A. D. Luckhoff, Ds. van Vuuren, Ds. D. P

van Huyssteen, Ds W. B Loubser, Ds J. S. Klopper and Ds. J. C. van Niekerk. From 1951 to 1953 the congregation was served by Ds. J. M. Opperman.

Some of the Afrikaners have become naturalized Argentinians in order to safeguard their title to property. The question of nationality does not often arise, however, as the Afrikaners do not usually leave the Argentine and thus do not require passports. The few surviving members of the original treks were born in South Africa and are entitled to South African nationality, and many of the second generation are South Africans by descent.

This little Afrikaner colony has known so much intermarriage that the young people now have to look beyond their own circle. They are marrying

Argentinians and also people of recent British, Dutch and German descent. Those who like to observe racial development in isolation (as I do) will find a romantic episode in the marriages which have taken place between the Afrikaner and the Welsh colonies in the Argentine.

Nearly a century ago a Welsh nationalist led an expedition of one hundred and fifty emigrants to Patagonia with the idea of preserving the Welsh language and customs in a pure form beyond the influence of other cultures. Many other Welsh families joined the colony later, and some of them have been successful in carrying out the ideas of the pioneer. Others, like some of the Afrikaners, have found it impossible to resist the surrounding Argentinian influences, and have

adopted Spanish as their home language.

When I returned from South America in the Dutch liner *Boissevain* I was fortunate in finding as a fellow passenger a Mrs. Anna Smit of Trelew in Patagonia. Mrs. Smit is a daughter of the pioneer Watson I have mentioned. Born in the Cape, she went to South America in the uncomfortable *Highland Fling*; and she remembers the voyage clearly although she was only five years old. Mrs. Smit told me that one of her sons had married a girl from the Welsh colony.

Mrs. Smit had spent nearly all her life in Patagonia. She had returned to South Africa under the repatriation scheme in 1938, but had settled in Patagonia again two years later.

Snow and ice were among Mrs. Smit's earliest memories. She remembered a little boy who was carried off by a puma during one of the hard, early winters. They found one hand in the snow.

Her father built several of the first houses in Comodoro Rivadavia, and also many farm homesteads for the Afrikaners. There was no water at Comodoro Rivadavia then, and barrels had to be filled miles away and carried by ox-wagon. "Now the place is almost a city," said Mrs. Smit.

She said that besides the natives and the Bushman who arrived with the trekkers there was one little Hottentot named Cacalas, brought by the Eloff family. Cacalas became the owner of a horse. He thought it was possible to ride back to South Africa and often declared that he would do so, but he

died in Patagonia. Mrs. Smit agreed that the Afrikaans language was slowly dying out in Patagonia. Church services were held in Afrikaans, English and Spanish. The government schools taught Spanish and English. There was a Dutch Reformed Church at Sarmiento, on the oilfields, and another (with a resident minister) in Comodoro Rivadavia. Many young Afrikaners were employed on the oilfields at salaries ranging from forty to one hundred pounds a month. Others clung to the land and owned thousands of sheep. Some were less prosperous, working as *bywoners*.

Mrs. Smit said there were so many people of British descent in Trelew that they had formed a British Association. The Afrikaners often took part in concerts and other cultural activities of the association, as they

found they had more in common with the British settlers than the people of other races.

“I like Patagonia, my children and grandchildren are there, and I am accustomed to the cold winters,” declared Mrs. Smit. “Moreover, I do not like the racial politics in South Africa. I think that some of those Afrikaners who returned to the Union before World War II would go back to the Argentine if they could find the money.”

Mrs. Smit was re-visiting South Africa to see her father, now aged ninety, still in good health and living at Ceres. “He has been a restless spirit all his life,” Mrs. Smit told me. “He travelled widely in the Argentine, and in 1940 he left the Afrikaner colony and set up as a grocer, baker and butcher at Entre Rios on the tropical Parana river. It

was too damp for him, and he settled in South Africa. But he may still decide to end his days in Patagonia.”

Clergymen from South Africa who have visited the community in Patagonia since World War II are convinced that they can no longer be regarded as Afrikaners. Most of them speak Afrikaans at home, and write to South African relations they have never seen. But they describe themselves as Argentinians, and the younger ones have little knowledge of South African affairs. They have heard of the native problem, however, and give this as a reason for remaining in the Argentine.

When the birth of a child of Afrikaner descent is registered nowadays, the Christian names must by law be inscribed in Spanish. Thus a Karel becomes Carlos; Johannes is now

Juan; and it is difficult to recognise little Engela as Angelita!

Yes the Afrikaners of Patagonia are vanishing, inevitably, but the story of their trek across the ocean is to be found in the graveyards and on the maps of the wild corner of a foreign land which they tamed when the century was young. There in the lonely places are the gravestones bearing names such as Grimbeek and Verwey, Greyling and Vogelpootjie, Dirks and Behr, Visser and Myburgh. On the maps, among the Spanish names, you will find Rus in Vrede, Moreson, Sterkfontein, Sleutelspoort and Driefontein, Louwfontein and Witkoppie, Swartberg and Goede Hoop. Mountains known as Sierras Overas in Spanish have the alternative name of Bontberge. Down on the coast where many of the pioneers landed, the

original Visserbaai is now Puerto Visser.

Mrs. Smit told me that only very small items of old Cape furniture would be found in Patagonia, as the people were unable to carry large pieces across the ocean. Among the Cape traditions firmly established there, however, was the cooking. Girls who had never seen South Africa were making bread according to the Cape farm recipes, and also such dishes as *tamatie bredie* and *sosaties*, *soetkoekies* and *melkert*. And the men were making biltong from the wild grey ostriches of Patagonia and the guanaco, the wild goat.

Most of the descendants of the Argentine trekkers are now firmly settled either in Patagonia or South Africa. A few are still torn between the two countries. Some living in the Union,

still have investments in Patagonia. I heard of a man who returned to Bloemfontein and then tore up his roots once more when he inherited a farm in Patagonia. I sympathise with those who have been unable to make up their minds, for it is no simple problem. One of them said to me: "We are always coming and going – we cannot find rest until we die." So the ocean trek has never ended. I repeat, those who live out their lives in one spot on this earth may spare themselves much anguish.

Chapter Thirty

MYSTERY IN THE MASCARENES

WHEN you sail north-eastwards from Durban you raise three large islands, the Mascarenes. They called them the Mascarenes because of their discoverer, Pedro Mascarenhas of Portugal; and they are Mauritius, Reunion and Radriguez.

Mauritius has half a million people and a bitter political situation. It is a large island, more than seven hundred square miles, with forests where ten thousand deer run wild. But I think Reunion and especially Rodriguez are still islands suitable for escapists.

I was not disappointed in the Mauritius I knew, for it seemed to be a blend of eighteenth century France, London policemen, Chinese shopkeepers and Indian labourers; the

dark islanders all speaking a patois called Creole which is a mixture of French, Dutch and English words with (thanks to the slaves) an African Bantu construction. Joseph Conrad, in spite of an unhappy love affair there, called this sugar island “a pearl distilling sweetness upon the world”.

Mauritius had many old sea-links with the Cape, and Van Riebeeck's diary often spoke of the ships that called when the Dutch had a fort there. Indeed, a Van der Stel was governor there before the Dutch settlement in Table Bay was started; and his wife, half-Dutch, half-Javanese gave birth to the boy Simon who was to become governor of the Cape. Simon's father brought the stags from Java to Mauritius, and at Curepipe you will find a memorial to this good Dutch governor.

However, the French seized and subdued the island, and held it for a century. An episode during this period inspired one of the world's great love stories, "Paul et Virginie" by Bernardin de St. Pierre. On the island I learnt the true origin of this story, and I am always deeply interested in origins. Perhaps you remember this classic about the French girl of noble family, in disgrace for marrying beneath her, who is taken to Mauritius by her husband. A daughter Virginie is born.

Then the husband dies and the widow does her best to work the little estate, aided by two slaves and a humble neighbour, also a widow. The neighbour has a son Paul. History repeats itself, and Paul (who is not of the aristocracy) falls in love with the blue-blooded Virginie. Far away in Paris,

an aunt of Virginie hears of this scandal, stops the marriage, and sends for Virginie.

Virginie goes dutifully to Paris, but refuses to give up her island lover. She returns to Mauritius, only to be shipwrecked and drowned within sight of home.

Bernardin de St. Pierre gained inspiration from the wreck of the ship *St. Geran* in 1744, near the place in Mauritius now known as Tombeau Bay, the "bay of tombs". There were two lovers on board, and they were to be married on arrival in Port Louis. When the ship went down the man made a raft and survivors declared that he implored the girl to tear off her voluminous clothes so that he might bring her through the surf in safety. Modest to the last she refused to commit such a gross breach of

decorum. So the lovers were drowned, and their graves were pointed out to me at the Bay of Tombs. Out of this incident the great novel arose.

I may say that the form of snobbery which came between Paul and Virginie still flourished among the Creoles (the old white, yes white aristocrats of French descent) when I was on the island. They seemed to be living in pre-revolution France, hospitable, dignified, with an art of living which I admired, but with no realisation of the march of time. If they had worn knee-breeches and crinolines their clothes would have matched their ideas.

Mauritius has always been like that. Old-fashioned ideas, prejudices and the wrong sort of customs (apart from some charming ones) have lingered far too long. This island which once knew

the guillotine changed over to the gallows after the British occupation. Until the end of World War II they observed the obsolete custom of running up a black flag at the prison when there was an execution, much to the gratification of the knitting women.

Mauritius has been ravaged by many plagues, including bubonic, so that the Creoles told me I was mad when I sat through a Chinese theatre performance in the teeming Chinese quarter of Port Louis. Indeed, this is a place where one has reason to shudder at the sight of a rat or a flea. Yet this island of cholera, smallpox, malaria and black death is noted for the longevity of its pensioners.

A friend on the island sent me, in 1932, a government report listing some of these old islanders. In that

year Abdul Syed Tymoor (who had retired in 1887 owing to “old age and infirmity”) was still drawing his pension at the age of one hundred and seven. Then there was an Indian stoker who had retired in 1885 “owing to ill-health”, and who was still receiving his pension at the age of ninety-four. A prison warder, aged ninety-five, was in the same happy position. Some of the pensioners over eighty and ninety had been retired on grounds of inefficiency but this had evidently never worried them. Most of these men were Indians; but one Englishman, who had been a stationmaster in Mauritius, had retired in 1894 on account of old age, and nearly forty years later he was still enjoying his pension of eleven hundred rupees a year-aged ninety-five.

My friend on the island commented: “Mauritius may be wet, tropical and relaxing – but could Cape Town or Bath produce figures to compare with these? Enter the civil service in Mauritius, work for a few years, and then go on pension for the next half century because of inefficiency, ill-health or old age.”

It was during a passage from Mauritius to Durban that a fellow passenger allowed me to gaze upon one of the rarest stamps in the world. A shrewd collector with a nose for these tiny paper treasures in far places, he had followed every clue in every corner of Mauritius until he had secured this prize. Not as a gift, of course, but at a fraction of the market value. He told me the story of the stamp, and his own search.

The stamp was one of the first ever produced on the island or in any British colony. It was engraved by a watchmaker at the request of the wife of the governor. She was giving a ball, and she was determined to send out the invitations by the novel method of posting the cards with stamps affixed. This was in 1847, and even in Britain the postage stamp was only seven years old.

Barnard the watchmaker burnished a slip of copper which had been used for printing visiting cards, and engraved a one penny stamp in one corner and a two penny in the other. They were similar to the first British stamps, with Queen Victoria's head and "Mauritius" on one side. They should also have carried the words "Post Paid", but Barnard engraved "Post Office" in error. The penny was

orange-red and the two penny a deep blue.

After the ball was over the error was noticed and the remaining stamps were withdrawn. No record exists of the number of stamps printed or the number of invitations to the ball. Most of the envelopes were destroyed because stamp-collecting had not yet become a hobby and no one imagined that the stamps would become valuable. Marvellous to relate, about a dozen of the stamps have survived. That great collector King George V (when Prince of Wales) paid £1,450 early this century for a mint two penny "Mauritius post office", a stamp which must now be worth ten thousand pounds. Some years later an American collector paid twelve thousand pounds for a used, addressed envelope bearing both stamps.

My friend the collector had advertised for old stamps in the Port Louis newspapers. He knew that his chances of locating a “post office” error were remote, and he was surprised when he received several replies offering him these famous stamps. He examined all of them with his magnifying glass. They were superb, but he suspected forgeries. Local experts confirmed this idea.

Years ago there lived in Port Louis a fine artist who amused himself in his spare time making copies of the “post office” stamps. My friend was advised to wet the corner of his handkerchief and test the colours of the stamps. Sure enough, the colours came off – except from one two penny blue stamp, which he bought. Nevertheless, there are still crafty Mauritians who produce envelopes, yellow with age,

addressed in the handwriting of long ago, and bearing the famous stamps. When they offer these objects to visitors they usually open the conversation with the words: “Monsieur, I know nothing about stamps. What will you give me for them?”

Mauritius, in the French period, was the home of a mysterious character named Etienne Bottineau, whose secret has never been revealed. He knew when ships would arrive.

The old shipping registers were kept in the port office at Port Louis when I was there. Like many other puzzled investigators I examined these books bearing dates from 1778 to 1782 and saw the entries predicting the arrivals of nearly six hundred vessels. And every arrival (sometimes four days

later) had been confirmed by the signatures of responsible port officials.

Bottineau was a naval officer who first gained local fame in Mauritius by betting that a ship would reach Port Louis within a certain number of days. After a time no one would accept these wagers, for Bottineau was seldom wrong. Bottineau then offered to sell his secret for a large amount. The French Minister of Marine ordered a register to be kept, and results were checked for two years. After this test the Viscount de Souillac, governor of the island, offered Bottineau ten thousand livres and a pension of twelve hundred livres a year if he would reveal his methods; but Bottineau refused.

Bottineau's most useful achievement was his report of a fleet of eleven vessels approaching Mauritius at a

time when France and England were at war. This was taken as an English fleet, and a sloop of war was sent out to reconnoitre. Before she returned Bottineau hastened to the governor and declared that the fleet had altered course. Not long afterwards a ship arrived from the East Indies and reported that she had seen eleven English ships heading towards Mauritius. All this was recorded at the time and ample documentary proof remains on the island.

Encouraged by a long series of successes and his local recognition as a prophet, Bottineau returned to France in 1784 with the idea of securing a proper reward for his services. During the voyage he astounded the captain of his ship by predicting the ships that would pass. Once this human radar warned the

captain that he was not more than thirty leagues from land. "This he denied to be possible," Bottineau wrote. "However, upon looking attentively at his reckoning he was compelled to acknowledge that he was in error, and immediately altered his course. I discovered land three times during the voyage; once at a distance of one hundred and fifty leagues."

Bottineau was given a cold reception at the Ministry of Marine in Paris, for he was a long way from the scene of his triumphs and his feats had been forgotten. He turned to a newspaper for publicity; but in spite of the certificates signed by the governor and other officials, his claims were ridiculed.

No less a character than Jean Paul Marat, the revolutionary leader, was impressed by Bottineau's powers and attempted to secure a fair trial for the

art of "Nauscopie" as Bottineau called it. (Marat was a trained physician and an electrical pioneer.) Bottineau never gave away the details of his secret, but he did set down certain principles which Marat quoted in a letter." A vessel approaching land must produce a certain effect upon the atmosphere and cause the approach to be discovered by a practised eye even before the vessel itself was visible," Bottineau wrote. "At the Isle de France (an earlier name for Mauritius) the clear sky and pure atmosphere, at certain periods of the day, were favourable to my studies. I had not been more than six months upon the island when I became confident that my discovery was certain, and that all that was requisite was to acquire more experience, and then 'Nauscopie' would become a real science."

Poor Bottineau had an accurate vision of the fate of his mission to Paris. He ended an appeal to the government with these words: "Should vexation and disappointment terminate my existence before I can explain my discovery, the world will probably be deprived for some time of an art that would have done honour to the eighteenth century."

It is a pity that Bottineau did not accept the ten thousand livres and the pension offered by the governor. That might have solved a mystery which has baffled everyone who has examined the pages upon pages of convincing records testifying to Bottineau's skill. I have seen De Souillac's own evidence, and here is an extract: "Since the war has broken out his announcements have been very numerous, and sufficiently correct to

create a sensation in the island. We have conversed with him upon the reality of his science; and to have dismissed him as a quack would have been an injustice ... What we can certify is that M. Bottineau was almost always right."

How was it done? Bottineau's own statement involves an atmospheric phenomenon which enabled him to sight ships on land far beyond the horizon. There is evidence of his belief that others could be trained to recognise the signs. I have already quoted an authentic document in which Bottineau gave a tantalising glimpse of his method. Another explanation, which may or may not be genuine has been attributed to Bottineau. It is interesting, even though it really only deepens the mystery. The document runs:

“The knowledge neither results from the undulation of the waves, nor from a particular sensation, but simply from observing the horizon, which bears upon it certain signs indicative of the approach of vessels, or land.

“When a vessel approaches land, or another vessel, a ‘meteor’ appears in the atmosphere, of a particular nature, visible to every eye, without any difficult effort. The existence of this ‘meteor’, and the knowledge of its different modifications, constitute the certainty and the precision of my announcements.

“If I am asked how it is possible that the approach of a vessel toward land can cause any ‘meteor’ to be engendered in the atmosphere, and what affinity exists between two effects so removed, I reply that I must be excused giving an account of the why

and the wherefore. It is sufficient that I have discovered the fact without being obliged to explain the principle.”

So we still do not know how it was done, though there have been theories. One investigator thought that the frequent mirage conditions of the tropics enabled Bottineau to make his predictions. Another theory was based on the possibility of telepathy between Bottineau and suitable subjects in passing ships.

I am not prepared to accept the explanation of coincidence over so long a period. Bottineau appears to me to have been gifted with the type of distant sight that the Bushmen and other primitive races possess; he could read faint signs invisible to ordinary people. Michael Faraday, the English scientist, studied Bottineau’s work early last century, at a time possibly,

when more evidence of Bortineau's methods was available. Faraday discussed the matter with a Captain the Hon. Francis Maude, R.N., who wrote a paper in which he stated that Faraday agreed with Bottineau's own theory of the "meteor" and the effects of a vessel on the horizon.

After the death of Bottineau there were men in Mauritius who claimed similar powers. I have seen a statement that a later "Nauscopist" was flung into prison for predicting the arrival of the British fleet in 1810, the year Britain occupied the island. But no one ever earned the wealth of written testimony that Bottineau was able to produce.

It would be strange if Bottineau was gifted in a way unknown before or since his time. After all, there have always been water diviners and others

in possession of extra-sensory knowledge. Thus I was not altogether surprised to read in a reputable London magazine of a West Indian negro, living on Turks Island towards the end of last century, who informed the islanders every year when the sailing schooners were about to arrive from Newfoundland with salt fish. This negro used a sort of bamboo "harp", and asserted that the schooners set up air-waves which could be detected by sounds in the slitted bamboos.

Perhaps there is a Bottineau among us even now, one who will part with the secret for less than the ten thousand livres which Bottineau refused.

Reunion is just visible from Mauritius on a clear day, for the Piton des Neiges (peak of snows) defies the

stretch of one hundred and twenty-five miles of ocean between the islands. Once a colony, Reunion is now a department of France.

It is a tortoise-shaped island, much larger than Mauritius, a lovely place of mountains and waterfalls, craters and chasms and ravines. A great flower garden where men have made fortunes distilling perfume from geraniums and growing vanilla; though more money comes from sugar and rum. However, the islanders are an easy-going race, and the five island towns – St. Denis (the capital), St. Louis, St. Pierre, St. Benoit and St. Paul – have their fair share of beachcombers and idlers.

It is said that the hardest work in Reunion is done by those adventurous shipmasters who take their vessels into the island's only harbour at Pointe des Galets. This is a horror. It is the worst

harbour in the world, and a steamer for which I had a great affection in my youth was wrecked inside that treacherous harbour.

Creoles in Mauritius have a phrase “Bourbon white” for linen of questionable whiteness. Bourbon is the old name of Reunion, and what they are really getting at is the mixture of human colours, the blue eyes and brunette faces. However, this is really an impertinence, for such blends are not unknown in Mauritius. But Reunion has been spared the invasion of Indian labourers which has made a powder-barrel of Mauritius. This leisurely French island has been called the “Athens of the Indian Ocean”, for no other outpost of the size of Reunion has given birth to so many fine poets and writers, men with international

reputations such as De Lisle and George Duhamel.

France has used isolated Reunion as a St. Helena on occasion, and Abd el Krim, the Rid leader, spent years in exile there. I exiled myself for a month on St. Helena once; and from what I have seen, Reunion would be my choice. You have more room to move in Reunion, the mountains are healthy, in fact you can find every type of climate from the tropics to the snows.

It is well to remember, however, that Reunion has an active volcano. Geologists regard it as one of the most interesting places in the world, for the old volcanic formation and the new are both on show. You can gaze into an active volcano with a crater ring four miles in diameter and see the whole history of volcanic action before you. But up to now this has

always been a benevolent volcano. I cannot find any account in which it has killed anyone.

Bory St. Vincent, a traveller who visited Reunion early last century, was not believed when he wrote of enormous eels in the island lakes, twenty feet long some of them. However, this was no more than the truth. Such eels have since been captured in the Mare Pules d'Eau near Salazie in the hills. Innkeepers cook steaks from them, as thick as a man's thigh. A landslide blocked the old channel from the lake of the eels to the sea, but the eels have evidently not been trapped in the lake. It is now known that they migrate overland when they move to their breeding grounds in the sea.

Reunion was captured by the British early last century, just before the conquest of Mauritius. Under the

peace treaty Reunion was returned to France as a result of a ridiculous error. British delegates were under the impression that it was in the West Indies, and regarded it as of no importance. Rodriguez, third of the Mascarenes, remained a British possession. I have never seen this most remote island of the trio, but a cable operator who spent three years there, leaving just before World War II, summed it up for me in a sentence. "When I stepped on shore in Cape Town, the noise of the traffic and the city hit me like a blow," he declared. It seems that Rodriguez should be included among the isles of the great hush.

The cable man gave me another contrast. There were no motor-cars in Rodriguez during his stay. He drove into Cape Town from the docks by

car, and found that his nerves were strained to the limit. He thought the driver was racing. Then he looked at the speedometer and found they were doing twenty miles an hour. For a long time after leaving the island he was acutely conscious of noise. In Rodriguez there was only the sound of surf on the reef, a musical lullaby.

Rodriguez, a dependency of Mauritius is ruled by a magistrate. The police force consists of a sergeant, a corporal and three constables. There is a government agricultural station and a Roman Catholic mission. The priests ride the only horse on the island.

Fort Mathurin, a village of two lanes with Chinese shops, a church, hospital, school and mosque, is the seat of government. On top of the island is the only other settlement, St. Gabriel, hidden among trees. The natives build

their houses without nails: frames are pegged together and the leaf roofs are tied on. When forest fires sweep the island, or cyclones roar over it, many native houses are destroyed. A new house can be built for a few pounds, however, so that disasters are not serious.

Rodriguez is a precipitous island nine miles long and four miles broad, cut up by valleys. When you go out for a walk you climb most of the time. Boats are used for transport round the island. The natives have shallow, lateen-rigged pirogues, which they pole along inside the coral reefs when there is no wind. White residents sail and also use outboard motors.

Living is cheap in Rodriguez, first because clothes do not count. White men and women wear shirts and shorts all the year round. It is never cold.

Everyone has a garden, and the soil will grow anything. Bananas ripen throughout the year. A native can keep a wife and six children on a few pounds a month, the diet being fish, maize, plantains, yams, oranges, rice and beef. Fishing with rod and line for caraux, blue and yellow tunny, perokeet with golden heads, cordonnier and unicorn fish is one of the main amusements. The natives harpoon squids, which are dried for export and catch other fish in baskets. Deer were left on the island years ago, and these are sometimes shot. Red-legged partridges and guinea fowl are plentiful.

Rodriguez is volcanic, with a crater in one of the mountain summits. Arab pirates visited the island in the sixteenth century, famous Dutch navigators cut their names on trees,

and France colonised the island early in the eighteenth century. A Dutch attempt at settlement was abandoned as a result of a plague of rats and monkeys. Privateers and pirates called at the island until the British occupation in 1809. Many slaves from Madagascar and East Africa were liberated there. The birth-rate is high, the death-rate low. People over ninety are common, with occasional centenarians.

It is an island of beautiful names—Diamond Bay, Tamarind, Grenade, Topaze, Cape Citronelle, Caverne, Coco and Trou d'Argent. Seldom indeed does Rodriguez appear in the day's news. I believe the last time this island came into the world's headlines was on the arrival there of a boat from the *Trevesa* at the end of an epic of the sea.

Chapter Thirty-One

ISLES OF THE GREAT HUSH

SOUTH of the equator in the Indian Ocean lie the isles of the great hush. They seem to be overshadowed by enormous Madagascar, for seldom or never do you hear of the small isles. Try to arrange a voyage and the leisurely schedule will make you feel that you are bound for the end of the world. Air lines have left these islands almost untouched. I know that Mauritius is an aerodrome on the route to Australia, but there are wide stretches of ocean where only the shadows of seabirds' wings fall on the coral isles. What profusion of islets you find in a coral ocean! Ordinary maps give no idea of these scattered reefs and sandbanks and atolls. Only the charts show all of them.

Study the large-scale charts of the South Indian Ocean and your magnifying glass will rest on queer places, bays and crumbs of coral, rocks and reefs named by the great navigators and the pirates. Here are False Galleon Bay and Coffin Island; and there are Wizard Island and Glorioso. It was on Murder Island, early last century, that two British midshipmen were killed by the natives. Siren Island, according to my book of sailing directions, swarms with rats. Yet I would make light of rats and reefs, cyclones and surf, if I could only stand on the white beach of Cascade Bay, or watch the sun rising over La Pouce again, the gigantic thumb of rock that dominates Port Louis and the harbour.

Someone more patient than I has counted more than two hundred isles

and islets as dependencies of Mauritius alone. It is possible to find romance in these solitudes, but for many the isolation has been frightening and loneliness has led to death. Even in recent years, shipwrecked people have waited a long time for help. I knew an Italian seaman who was wrecked on one of the coral islets between the wars. They had no wireless, and the castaways had to wait for more than two months before a cargo steamer passed that way and saw their distress signal. The Italian told me: “I never forgetta dat bleddy island – for eight week I eata da bleddy cокkernut.” As a matter of fact they had some rice saved from the wreck, and fish and turtle as well; but turtle is not always a luxury.

Certainly that Italian was far more fortunate than the survivors of the

French ship *Prophete*, which was flung and smashed on a coral shoal of the Cargados Carajos atolls a century ago. Those wretched people lived for many weeks on sea-birds’ eggs.

Coral is cruel to ships. It is a killer in seas where the charts are inaccurate. Coral reefs in the Indian Ocean must have claimed some of the missing ships of every century. Some gained the dubious refuge of mid-ocean islands only to find that the spark of life could not be maintained on the resources of such barren shores. I am thinking now of the wreck of the schooner *La Creole* on Agalega Island early last century. She was merely coasting round Mauritius when a British man-o’-war chased her northwards. The schooner escaped, only to encounter heavy weather. She ran

before the gale and shattered herself at night on Agalega.

Two islands linked by a sand ridge which dries out at low tide, make up Agalega. The larger island is six miles long; both are surrounded by reefs; and early last century they were uninhabited and covered with casuarina trees. Palm trees flourish over thousands of acres today; hares, partridges, guinea-fowl, pigs and even peacocks have been found in a wild state at different times. But when the unhappy survivors of *La Creole* struggled on shore there were only the sea-birds, the turtle on the beach, the fish within the reef. Fortunately they found some fresh water by digging.

The young captain, Robert Dufour (son of a well-known corsair) decided that it would be hopeless to await rescue. He ordered his men to build a

small, open boat from the wreckage. This was done and he sent a few picked men away in her to fetch help from the Seychelles. The boat was picked up by a British frigate, but there was a war on and the frigate was bound elsewhere. Dufour and the others, including a seventeen-year-old girl of the Mauritius aristocracy named Adelaide D'Emmerez, waited in vain for a sail to lift over the horizon. Dufour was in love with this girl, and was taking her home to Mahebourg on the coast of Mauritius when the British ship appeared.

They waited, but no one will ever know how long they waited. They waited until they died. About five years after the wreck of *La Creole* a party arrived from Mauritius to examine Agalega with the idea of starting a settlement and planting

coconut palms. These people found the bones of *La Creole* and the skeletons of her crew. An even more sad and dramatic moment came thirty years later. The manager of the Agalega settlement chanced upon a grave on the hillock of the northern island, and a bottle containing a message signed by Captain Dufour : “I am responsible for her death, since it was I who proposed the voyage; but I swear before God before I die that the virtuous and lovely angel was always respected by me.” The hillock, which is really no more than a mound of sand, has been named Montagne D’Emmerez.

Yes, those isles are really lonely and there is another such place called Tromelin Island where something like a miracle of survival occurred in the last years of the eighteenth century.

Tromelin is a sand-bank one mile long rising only fifteen feet above the ocean at its highest point, and partly covered with low bush. This scrap of land rises all by itself two hundred and forty miles to the east of Madagascar and three hundred miles from Mauritius.

France maintains a weather station on Tromelin nowadays, and a meteorologist is marooned there for six months at a time with two white companions and several native servants. (Frenchmen, with their art of living, cannot stand more than six months of that sort of monotony.) They have wooden huts and apparatus for distilling fresh water from the sea. Madagascar receives timely cyclone warnings from Tromelin.

Back in 1797, when the French transport *L’Etoile* ran ashore on Tromelin in the darkness, the island

had not yet received either a name or a single token of civilisation. The only fresh water was left in pools when rain fell. Fish, shellfish and occasional turtle were the only food supplies.

Seven hundred people were drowned when *L'Etoile* broke up, and one hundred and ten came through the surf and the tidal race to the bleak island shore. Of these survivors, thirty were Frenchmen, mainly soldiers, the remainder black men and women, servants and other camp followers.

The white men saw at a glance that their days on the Tromelin sandspit were numbered. Desperately they worked on a flat-bottomed boat, and selfishly they pushed off for Madagascar with whatever food they could lay hands on. I could find no record of their fate. Probably they perished, for

no ship came to Tromelin for twelve years after the wreck.

Twelve years! It is almost incredible that anyone should have been left alive after twelve years. Apart from the problems of water and food, Tromelin lies so low that in heavy weather it is swept by the seas. It must have been agony in a cyclone, when every hut would be torn away and a human being might survive only by crouching in the bush and hanging on with great determination while half-drowned by the sea.

Yet when Captain Tromelin took his ship *La Dauphine* close in one day in 1809 he saw through his telescope a dozen frantic human figures waving from the beach. He sent a boat through the reef with difficulty, and twelve black women were brought on board. They described the wreck, and said

that the rest of the black survivors had soon starved to death. But for twelve years they had kept themselves alive with the meagre gifts of the sea. Turtle, fish, and shellfish. The wreck yielded little or nothing. Without the regular meals of shellfish they would have perished. I wish that Captain Tromelin had left a more detailed story. He was too brief, but he did mention the fact that most of the twelve black women had white hair when rescued.

I know that the fittest sometimes perish while frail women come through ordeals which strong men cannot stand. Yet the survival of those twelve women in the face of thirst and hunger and the weather for twelve years still holds a mystery. I would have suspected a piece of fiction if the wreck of *L'Etoile* and the sequel had

not appeared in the French guide to mariners for the Indian Ocean. A brief account also appears in the British Admiralty sailing directions. This refers to the wreck as the *Utile* and states that seven women maintained themselves for fifteen years, mainly on shellfish and brackish water: I believe, however, that the sources I have consulted give the correct version. And now the great hush lifts as the wireless transmitter speaks from Tromelin Island, the island named after the rescuer of those forlorn black women.

Can you bear to endure the solitude with another unknown and forgotten Crusoe of the Indian Ocean? Well then, here is Providence Island and its satellites, just dots in the ocean about five hundred miles to the north of Tromelin. Isles of the deep hush ...

Providence was named when the crew of the wrecked French frigate *Heureuse* waded on shore there two centuries ago. A firm in the Seychelles now keeps a manager to watch the labourers at work tending the coconut palms; and once in four months a schooner calls. Providence is a narrow island, two miles long. The other islets of the group are little sand cays or ridges of coral, each with a few coconut palms, cassava bushes, turtle ponds, and dense scrub of wild hibiscus. On one islet the frigate birds and boobies are at home. Guano has been deposited there through the ages, and this is scraped up and sent away.

Captain Cremasy sailed to Providence from Reunion in the ketch *Henriette* sixty years ago, a young Frenchman from Normandy making a living out of his own small craft. On this voyage he

carried spades and picks, for he hoped to dig up a cargo of little coconut plants on Providence (then uninhabited) and sell them in Reunion to the copra plantation owners.

Cremasy went on shore by himself on arrival, found what he was seeking and sent the dinghy back to the *Henriette* for men, picks and spades. The dinghy was alongside the ketch when a gale sprang up and the mate had to take the *Henriette* away from the anchorage to avoid being driven ashore. He saved the ship, but left his captain with only the shirt and trousers he wore, and a matchet, a broad, heavy knife like a cutlass.

As he explored the island, Cremasy saw clearly that others had lived there before him. They had grown yams. Pawpaw seeds had either drifted ashore or someone had planted the

fruit. Prickly pears had gained a footing, too. And there were wild pigeons in the palm groves, turtles on the beach, fish in the shallow pools when the tide went out. Cremasy was alone, but his standard of living was luxurious in comparison with the women castaways of Tromelin.

In his mind, however, was a certain uneasiness. He knew that the mate would bring the *Henriette* back to Providence as soon as possible. But if the little ship was damaged in the gale, it would be a long time. And if she foundered, then years might pass before anyone looked in at isolated Providence Island.

Cremasy, a resourceful C'rusee, set to work to make himself comfortable. Rats had run across his body during the first night on the island, so he built himself a rat-proof enclosure of

prickly pear leaves. He cut poles and set up a hut thatched with the broad leaves from the coconut palms. Pools of rain water stood in the palms groves, and there was an old well which yielded drinkable water. Fire was a serious difficulty, and he found (like many others without matches) that primitive man's method of twirling a stick in a wooden hole, with coconut shavings ready, is not easily achieved by civilised man. However, he made the wood glow after hours of patient effort, and he never allowed that fire to go out.

On the highest point he could find near the hut Cremasy piled up a beacon of driftwood and dry branches and the trunks of old coconut palms. Then he awaited rescue with all the philosophy he could muster. His life consisted of the hunt for food; catching fish with

his hands; knocking dawn pigeons with a pole; opening coconuts with his matchet. He cooked his fish and birds in turtle shells and often baked his yams in the embers.

But always Cremasy gazed with the keen eyes of a seaman round the horizon. Often he saw clouds shaped like ships. Ten weeks passed before he saw a shape that was not a cloud, but his own *Henriette*. He leapt to his beacon with a torch; and as the smoke rose he heard an answering signal, a gunshot from the ketch.

Cremasy learned that the *Henriette* had been blown far to the south-west, and had put in to Mayotte, five hundred miles away, to make new sails, splice new rigging, and replace the broken spars. Those were the days when seamen carried out these tasks themselves. But it required time; and

all the time Cremasy was drinking coconut milk and wondering ...

When he returned to Reunion he filled a school exercise book with the tale of his life as the Crusoe of Providence. It was never published, but mercifully for me (ignorant as I am of the great French language) an English translation found its way to Mauritius, and a copy came my way. I still want to spend an hour or two on shore at Providence and see whether there is anything left of Captain Cremasy's occupation. His name, cut with the matchet on a palm trunk? Or the last remnants of that little camp surrounded by prickly pears? No, I am afraid not. The cyclones must have swept away the last trace long ago.

In some ways the strangest of all the uninhabited Indian Ocean islands is Juan de Nova in the Mozambique

Channel, seventy-five miles from the Madagascar coast. This was an island of dogs years ago, and perhaps it is still the kingdom of the dogs.

For centuries seamen have dreaded Juan de Nova, and with good reason. A fierce and unpredictable current sets towards the island, and the reefs are strewn with wrecks. One or more of these wrecks may have set the dogs free on the island; or perhaps the Sakalava fishermen from Madagascar, who visit the island every year for turtle, left the dogs behind. So many breeds and cross-breeds are represented in the Juan de Nova packs that I imagine fresh blood must have reached the island at various times.

I first heard of the dogs from a seaman who spent three weeks on Juan de Nova in 1911, after the s.s. *Tottenham* had driven on to the reef in the

darkness. It was years afterwards that I met him, but he recalled vividly the surprise of all on board when the officer of the watch shouted: "White water ahead!" They struck the reef with engines reversed, and they never came off. When the tide went out the *Tottenham* was high and dry, and they walked round her before exploring the island.

"On the beach we saw the dog – scores of wicked-looking mongrels of every colour," declared the seaman. "A queer thing we all noticed was that there was hardly a bark among the lot of them. They whined loudly at night, but they seemed to have lost their civilised barks. Another thing was the way they drooped their tails, like wolves. The mate fired a shot over them and they pelted off into the bush. But they were a nasty-looking bunch.

We lived on board the *Tottenham* until H.M.S. *Forte* came along and took us to Durban.”

No doubt the Portuguese, the Dutch and the French all lost ships on Juan de Nova in the days of the caravels and galleons. Early reports speak of Juan de Nova as a bird island, covered with forest, and with an enormous baobab in the centre which is held sacred by the Sakalava.

Cats have also escaped from wrecks. Dogs and cats probably reached the shore when the barque *St. Abbs* broke in two there in the middle of last century; the ship in which the crew went berserk after broaching the cargo of spirits. The schooner *Baron Hamelin* joined the lost ships of Juan de Nova in 1863, and four years later, during a season of fearful cyclones, the *Borodino* was driven ashore. The

Tottenham made a fine landmark for many years this century; and she was joined shortly before World War II by the cargo steamer *Baron Polwarth*.

So the bird life of the island has suffered, with rival gangs of dogs and cats preying on rare and vanishing species. Rats have also gained a footing and have bred in such numbers that the dogs and cats have never exterminated them. A weird place is Juan de Nova, and if my account of it is out of date it is because few people apart from the fishermen ever set foot there. I have tried to unearth a recent scientific description, but all I could find was a reference to a visit by a German professor, Dr. A. Voltzkow – in 1894.

I never heard of a treasure on Juan de Nova, but many of the other isles have legends and some have actually yield-

ed a gleam of silver or gold. Though I am fond of listening to such tales, I must remind you that the only genuine treasure which some (but not all) find on these isles is the peace of the great hush.

Since the end of World War II, divers have investigated some of the legends and brought back remarkable underwater photographs of sunken galleons, medieval anchors, and bell-mouthed cannon encrusted with coral. If they came across any pieces of eight they kept quiet about it, after the custom of shrewd divers. You never know who might expect a share.

Thus, when I tell you about the sunken and buried treasures of the Indian Ocean I realise full well that I may be speaking not only of myths but also of treasure that was once hidden and which has been removed long ago.

Olivier le Vasseur, the pirate who was nicknamed “La Bouche”, went to the gallows on July 17, 1730 at St. Denis in Reunion Island. Before the executioner bound his arms, “La Bouche” threw a map into the crowd. “Find the treasure who can!” were his last words before the trap fell. The pirate had a sense of humour, and the clues were presented in cipher. Many copies were made, many a scholar has pored over the map, many an expedition has gone out hopefully. About ten years ago a party arrived at Belle Ombre village on Mahe in the Seychelles, seeking the gold and jewels that “La Bouche” looted from a Portuguese ship. They used dynamite. I suspect that they found only coral.

Silhouette; another island in the Seychelles, is a reputed treasure island. Copra has yielded a good

revenue there, but copra is not so romantic as the gold which the pirates buried there while they careened and scraped and tarred their ships in the shallows.

An aged negro, who had been released on Silhouette during the slave days, was still alive there shortly after World War I. He claimed knowledge of the cache; but he was an obstinate and superstitious old man and after one unfortunate experience he refused to lead anyone to the spot. It seems that a wealthy landowner from Mahe once managed to bribe the ex-slave to reveal the secret. They rowed round to a most difficult and precipitous part of Silhouette, and the guide was about to climb into the interior when he saw that he had been followed. He was so frightened that he returned to his boat. After that he trusted no one.

Houdoul the pirate was buried on Mahe. His tomb lies close to the granite walls of the house he built, and on the tombstone is a picture of his old ship and an inscription which was translated for me:

“Here lies Jean Francois Houdoul, former captain of corsairs. Born June 15, 1765. Died January 10, 1835.”

Houdoul was believed to have buried a part of his treasure in his tomb long before his death. The islanders say that they would not disturb the old pirate's bones for any amount of treasure. That what they say.

My old friend Julian Mockford, a great island lover in his day, spent much time investigating the treasure legends of the Seychelles. He was shown golden earrings dug up near the town of Victoria in Mahe, and he saw a few

strange old coins found in the sand. People spoke with deep conviction of doubloons and jewels on this island and that; but they said the lucky planters had always remained silent, and marketed the treasure slowly and carefully with the aid of trustworthy Indians and Arab dhows.

Captain Kidd may have hidden some of his treasure on the Indian Ocean isles. Zanzibar has often been named as a possible cache. During four visits to Zanzibar I made a point of visiting various supposed treasure sites. One spot was the old Dunga Palace ruin, which all Arabs believe to be haunted. When it was pulled down half a century ago the skeletons of slaves, buried alive within the thick walls, came to light. The sacred Swahili war drums and horns of carved wood (now in the Zanzibar museum) were also

found. But the most valuable find in that neighbourhood was made much earlier by an Arab who was burying a dead donkey. He unearthed a store of gold coins bearing the name of Haroun al-Raschid, Sultan of Baghdad. I cannot explain why Kidd should have been linked with this treasure, but such is the legend. When the coins were found, the ruling Sultan of Zanzibar set his men digging round and about the palace, apparently without success.

Another treasure site in Zanzibar is close to a baobab tree where the guides show you marks cut in the bark. (I suspect that these clues are renewed from time to time for the good of the trade.) Here some men came from the sea, unearthed a box, and departed – according to the local story. But it is on record that a metal box filled with gold ingots was dug up

when the foundations were being prepared for the present Sultan's palace of Zanzibar.

Perhaps the most promising treasure trail leads to the Ile des Deposes in the Farquhar group to the north of Madagascar. French officials were conducting into exile a native potentate who had displeased them; a chief with his harem, attendants and wealth. This was a century ago. They were bound for France when the ship was lost on the north-west side of the island, where the British steamer *Aymestry* was wrecked some years later.

Farquhar was a desolate, uninhabited scrap of land in those days. The chief and some of the followers reached the shore, but when the next ship visited Farquhar the chief was the only soul to have survived the ordeal of the lonely

island. He was mad, and he never recovered.

The rescuers decided that when the chief reached the shore, the treasure had come with him. Perhaps they found enough to convince them that more was hidden on the island. At all events the graves on Farquhar have been disturbed by more than one expedition. A crucifix was uncovered years ago. I would prefer clues leading away from graves.

Such are the remote Indian Ocean isles and their legends. I shall remember the approach to the low coral isles when my days of tropic voyaging are over. First the dot on the horizon which grows and lengthens and shows you the dome-shaped tops of palm and banyan trees. Then the green line of the shallows, the white surf on the reef, the bush and the boats and palm-

thatched huts, the children and the chickens. And finally the excited men coming out to greet you as the anchor goes down and the great hush of solitude is broken at last.

THE END

INDEX

The index below is as it was in the original paper book but in this e-book the page numbers have all changed and have therefore been removed. Otherwise the original index is left unchanged to display the authors choice and readers should use their program's search facility to locate the item.

Abandoned ships

Agalega Island

Agnar

Albatross Rock

Allanshaw

Ambergris

Argentine Afrikaners

Argentine meat

Dr. W. J. **Arnold**

Arundel Castle

Atlantis

Australia

Avenida de Mayo

Avenida Rio Branco

Baker's Oven

Mrs. **Barrow**

Louis **Bauman**

Benns (of Knysna)

J. R. **Black**

Blenden Hall

Boissevain

Etienne **Bottineau**

Bouvet Island

Bridekirk

Captain Robert **Brooks**

(Capt) John Crombie **Brown**

Buenos Aires

Burton Port

Calle Corrientes

Calle Florida

Cape Agulhas

Cape Flats ship

Cape Girl
Cape Receife
Cargados Carajos
Cave Point
Chance
Chapman's Bay
Chinese explorers
Chinese Hottentots
Chub
Circe
Clan Ferguson
Clara
Captain W. H. **Coates**
H. R. P. **Cochran**
Afonso **Coelho**
Coffee
Coffin Island
George **Collis**
George **Comer**
Joe **Conquer**
Conservative
Copacabana

Dr. R. W. **Coppinger**
Corcovado
Cornwall
Betty **Cotton**
Captain **Cremasy**
Captain R. D. **Cruickshank**
Cyclone

Darsena Norte
Professor Raymond **Dart**
Desertas
Dr. G. Vibert **Douglas**
Dredgers
Drummond Castle
Captain **Dumaresq**
Dunedin Star
Dunnottar Castle
Duiker Point

Edward Vittery
Hans **Ellefsen**
Emily

Emily Faithfull
Enterprise
Eros

False Galleon Bay
False Killer Whales

J. G. Fenton

Ferret
Fire at sea
First at the Cape
Forget-me-Not
Fourteen Mile Beach

Galeka

Mr. A. S. ("Sandy") **Garden**

Roderick **Garden**

Mr. Arthur **Garwood**

Garthforce

Geelbek

Dr. Leonard **Gill**

Corporal William **Glass**

Glorioso

Goorkha
Captain **Gough**
Gough Island
Grantully Castle
Peter **Green**

John **Hagan**

Captain Alfred Charles **Harding**

H. C. Richards

Hardekraaltje

Captain W. H. **Harris**

Hellespont

Henry B. Paul

Herodotus

Captain Peter **Heywood**

Highland Fling

J. M. **Hill**

Hog's Tooth

Hondeklip Bay

Icebergs

Inaccessible Island

Ingerid
Iron Queen
Isla Grande
Captain Axel **Johanson**
John Paterson
Juan de Nova Island

Kadie
Captain Thomas **Kerry**
Keying
Captain **Kidd**
Kowie

La Cabana
Jonathan **Lambert**
Lambert's Bay
Captain **Lancaster**
Langebaan
Las Palmas
Longevity

Mabel Clark

Madagascar
Madeira
Tony **Madison**
Makalakas
Malagas
Man overboard
George **Maple**
Maria Frederika
Mascarene islands
Matto Grosso
Mauretania
Mauritius
Commodore G. H. **Mayhew**
Captain Charles **McClure**
Mermaids
William and Sadie **Messina**
Meteor
Mignonette
Massing Ships
Captain T. **Moore**
Montagu
Montevideo

Morewood Cove

Morning

Mosvalla

Murder Island

Namaqualand coast

Commander **Oldfield**

Olifant's River

Captain W. F. W. **Owen**

James **Palmer**

Pandora

Panther

Papanui

Paparoa

Parma

Pendennis Castle

H.M.S. ***Penelope***

Penguin

Captain **Percival**

Phoenicians

Phoenix

Captain W. W. Pierce

Pillars of Hercules

Pinar Azul

Ping Suey

Plaza Britanica

Port Elizabeth

Port Nolloth

Praca Maua

Prince Edward

Prison hulks

Providence Island

Ptolemy

Queen of the Thames

Rats on Tristan

Record passages

Retiro

Reunion

Rio de Janeiro

Ripley Castle

Captain **Riseborough**
River Plate
Rodriguez
Rev. Henry Martyn **Rogers**
Tom **Rogers**
Rosebud
J. Q. **Rowett**
Royal Interocean lines
Rua Acre
Rua Buenos Aires
Russian fleet

Sailing directions
St. Helena
St. Helena Bay
St. Helena Nova
St. Paul's Rocks
Salamander
Salamander Bay
Saldanha
Salvage Islands
Santa Brigida

Santos
Sao Paulo
Paddy **Saunders**
Saxemburgh Island
Schuylenberg
Scindia
Scot
Robert **Semple**
Sir Ernest **Shackleton**
Sherard Osborn
Shipbuilding
Silhouette Island
Simon's Bay
Siren Island
Small craft voyages
South Trinidad
Captain **Spieß**
Stabilizers
Stofbergfontein
Stolen ships
Struys Bay
Success

Captain Howard **Summers**

Ben **Swain**

Captain **Sylvester**

Table Bay Docks

Percy **Taylor**

Theodore

Thermopylae

George **Thompson**

Captain A. C. **Thomson**

Wybrand **Thuynsma**

Tigre

Tokai

Captain de la Cour **Travers**

Treasure isles

Tristan da Cunha

Tristan shipwrecks

Tristan treasures

Tromelin Island

Truls

Union-Castle Line

Cornelis **Van der Stel**

Simon **Van der Stel**

J. **Van Ploeg**

J. **Van Ryneveld**

Via Anchieta

Captain Alan **Villiers**

Vondeling Island

J. C. **Voss**

Waratah

War time mysteries

W. H. **Watson**

Whale mysteries

Captain D. C. **Wilbur**

Wild Rose

Wilhelmina Cornelia

Windsor Castle

Witsands

Wizard Island

Woodville

Frank **Worsley**

Xora River

Captain Adam **Yule**

Yzerfontein

Zanzibar

Zitrin